GODS OF HARN™

COLUMBIA GAMES INC. #5003

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The Libram of the Pantheon

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INTRODUCTION

Religion In Fantasy Role Playing

Every human culture has metaphysical beliefs. It is, therefore, appropriate that the gamemaster of a fantasy environment address himself to the beliefs within his world.

The Reality Of The Gods

Gamemasters must make some decision concerning the nature of the divine beings who must live, at least in the minds of men. There are only two real courses that the GM can take, and he need not inform his players of his ultimate decision. Either the gods are only the figments of the imaginations of men, or they truly exist.

Perspective

This module is written from (more or less) the point of view of Harnians, the majority of whom believe implicitly in the existence of the gods. Whether or not the GM decides that the gods exist in his world, it is probably a good idea to present them as if they do. This aids the "scientific" twentieth century player to identify with what might otherwise seem too great a suspension of disbelief.

Kelestia: The Nature Of Everything

Kelestia is everything that exists, the sum total of all realities. Most of the religious movements of western Lythia share a common set of metaphysical beliefs. The origin and general nature of Kelestia are not in dispute, since most educated Kethirans share the same general views. Areas of disagreement lie elsewhere. Different sources of divine revelation agree on the story of creation. All of the major gods have revealed the same basic ideas to their followers.

Kelestia is not governed soley by physical laws of space and time. While each universe has its own laws, there is also a set of master laws governing Kelestia as a whole. A planet may be inaccessable to other worlds in its own universe, but because of the warping of Kelestia, it may be possible to reach worlds in other universes using higher dimensional paths, referred to (somewhat imprecisely) as travel in the "Nth dimension". Those who travel such routes refer to it as "walking in shadow", "crossing the void", "taking the cenotaph road", and so on.

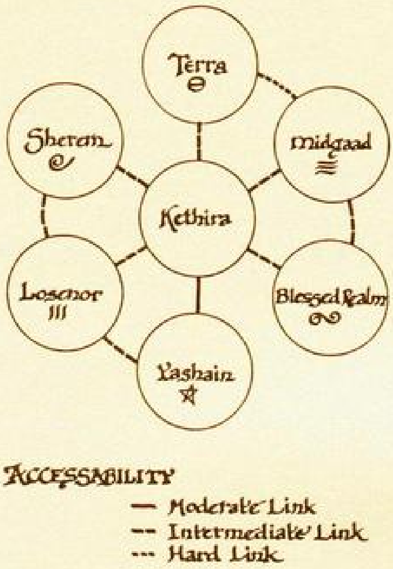
Familial Worlds

In the Nth dimension, worlds are arranged around a "parent" world, or nexus. The nexus world gathers lines of force and warps space-time to adopt alien worlds into the "family". The arrangement is largely a random process. Because it is rare for the worlds of a family to lie in the same universe (and be governed by the same physical laws) the members of a family need not be similar. Travel between worlds is never easy, but travel between the nexus and others in the family is easiest. Accessability between members of the family ranges from moderate to impossible.

The Kethrian Family

The world of Kethira, on which Harn is located, is the nexus of a family of seven worlds. Kethira is a kind of crossroads. No one in living memory has explored the whole family. There is a wide variation in the status of the gods, magic and technology on the different worlds of the family.

The Kethrian Family



Kethira And Yashain: A Special Relationship

Two of the worlds of the Kethrian Family, Kethira and Yashain, have a unique relationship. The links with other worlds are generally shifting and vague, but between these two there are a large number of constant, point to point, even region to region, correspondences. Various sites exist (in some form) on both worlds at the same time.

Most of the gods of Harn (with the notable exception of Siem) are believed to reside on Yashain, which is Kethira's "half-world". Most Kethirans spend their afterlives on Yashain in the service of their chosen deities. Yashain is divided into kingdoms governed by the gods. Earldoms and baronies are ruled by demons and demigods. There is a constant state of war, good against evil, and order against chaos.

LIBRAM OF THE PANTHEON

Around 120 TR, the basic beliefs of Harnians were collected into a single tome called the "Libram of the Pantheon", by Nala-Uroh of Elkall-Anuz. Uroh based his efforts on earlier works, few of which seem to have survived. The Libram has since received the approval of most churches.

The Natal Wars

First, Uroh writes, there was universal chaos; time and space had no meaning, reality was not fixed. From this arose the "First Gods", the "Immutable Ones", who were the only beings able to stand against the chaos. These beings were principles of power rather than conventional gods. They made war upon each other, threatening to destroy the cosmos. One result of the wars was the creation of the "Lesser Gods" to serve the First Gods and do battle on their behalf. It is these lesser gods who are now worshipped.

Finally, when it became apparent that the war threatened the existence of Kelestia, the First Gods made peace. Each was to have his own realm and to participate in the government of the whole. This peace resulted in Kelestia taking more or less its present form. Peace was not yet achieved, however, for the Lesser Gods, released from service, began to battle each other.

The Concordat Of The Illimitable Tome

The First Gods watched, knowing that Kelestia could only be changed, not destroyed by the War of the Lesser Gods. The new gods were able to reproduce themselves, but they were not invulnerable and could slay each other. After many had been destroyed, the survivors entered into the Concordat of the Illimitable Tome, the Ke'lha-Hy-Var-Hyvrak. The Concordat created laws to govern the ways in which the gods could intervene in the affairs of mortals and to govern the ways in which the gods could compete for supremacy. The complexity of these laws is cited as the main reason that the ways of gods are often inexplicable to men. When a deity intercedes to aid an impious scoundrel after denying the pleas of a loyal saint, observers may well shrug their shoulders and say, "'tis the Concordat and not the will of the god".

In the course of the wars, many new races and creatures, the sapient mortals among them, had been created. The origin of the creatures of the mortal planes is far from certain. Most believe that the mortal races sprang from the way in which the First Gods made peace. If this is the case, the lesser races have existed almost as long as the gods, and at one time were nearly their equals.

They had been allowed free access to knowledge (the ultimate power) but had also been placed under various compulsions to serve the gods. The mortal creatures lacked the wisdom to control their knowledge. The gods concluded that the greatest danger they faced was the spread of knowledge among those who lacked restraint. The gods chose Save-K'nor to maintain the Var-Hyvrak (the Illimitable Tome), wherein would be written all knowledge. Much was hidden from the mortal races.

THE NATURE OF THE GODS

The motives of the gods vary. The kind of universe desired by Morgath, the Lord of Chaos, is different from that wanted by Peoni, the gentle patron of healing. Their problem is that they cannot destroy each other without risking all their destructions. The Kethrian Family, in which they seem to be trapped, is not great enough for all of them. Hence, the Concordat limits the actions that may be taken.

Conflict between the gods is now more or less confined to the mortal and semi-mortal planes of Kethira and Yashain. Siem has withdrawn to the Blessed Realm and Save-K'nor has established his neutrality. Peoni is effectively non-combatant. Larani stands, essentially alone, against Morgath and Agrik. These two evil deities have not formed an alliance, and are almost as likely to act against each other, but it is their works that the Lady of Paladins most tries to undo. These divisions are not simply based on morality. The quasi-war between Larani and the dark pair is more complex than a simple epic. Agrik, and especially Morgath, represent a degree of chaos, a breaking down of order that would greatly change the worlds. To prevent total chaos, and enforce the Concordat, the other gods will usually support Larani, but their inclination is to care for their own concerns.

Yashain is the most active battlefield. There armies of the dead fight border clashes between the kingdoms. From time to time, the forces of Sarajin, Halea, Naveh and even Ilvir take part, but these gods tend to switch sides on short notice; their objective is to maintain a balance of terror conducive to their own activities. This is the situation that has pertained since the Concordat.

TALES OF THE LESSER GODS

A large body of myth is shared by the major religions of Kethira. The following are extracts of some of the most interesting and fundamental. Different churches regard these tales with varying attitudes. To many, the form and message of a myth is more important than its truth. Some, however, believe each word is the revelation of the gods, literal truth beyond question. However true they may be, the legends cannot be substantiated by normal means. Many occured long before there were any records kept by mortals, some before such races existed. The order of events is often confused. Most theologians regard such details as irrelevant, although fundamentalists occasionally try to construct timelines.

The Wars Of Dawn

When the First Gods had withdrawn from conflict, some gods still battled, knowing no other way. This was the time of the war of the lesser gods, before the Concordat. The battle for supremacy was fought openly and with little thought of mercy; gods fell, were imprisoned and even slain. There were acts of great heroism and cowardice in this epic and tragic time. Gradually their numbers dwindled, and they were able to make peace. This was an age of great tales.

The Eldest God

First, it is said, there was Siem. Of the lesser gods, the Lord of Dreams grew first from the chaos. While other gods waged war in the "worlds between the worlds", Siem journeyed to the mortal planes and perceived the peril of the Sindarin and Khuzdul (elves and dwarves). Siem did not create the elder peoples, but he gave them their special powers and made them what they are. This cost them their youthful innocence, but gave them the necessary abilities to survive the difficult times that were to follow.

While wars raged between the lesser gods, Siem prepared places for the lesser races. Perceiving that most of Kelestia would be for men, he set aside the Blessed Realm for the elves and dwarves, and made it his own kingdom, a "perfect" place for his chosen people, a world from which he could hold most of the violence of the worlds. Then he sought out his folk. First to Midgaad, where he led a migration of the elves and dwarves from great defeat, then to the other worlds to gather together those who had gone astray. Not all his folk followed him. Some had built their hopes on Yashain, Kethira or Midgaad. Siem would not impose his will upon his peoples. Those who stayed behind were not abandoned. Siem aided where he could, but his power was greatest in the Blessed Realm.

Morgath And Bukrai

The origin and nature of the "Orb That Cannot be Viewed" are lost to the time when the First Gods had not made peace. Bukrai is a sphere of black nothingness, said to be a "gate" to the plane where the essence of the First Gods dwell. Why they left such an artifact is unknown. Perhaps it is a window through which they can perceive the lower planes and the doings of gods and men. Perhaps, as is often held, Bukrai is actually one of the Immutable Ones, the

"Mad God", imprisoned within the sphere for the good of Kelestia. Whatever its true nature, for aeons the lesser gods were aware of Bukrai, never fully understanding its nature, nor daring to gaze within.

There came a time when Morgath, who was not then as he is now, was besieged within his stronghold by three gods and their armies. It seemed certain that his realm would fall and that he would perish. Morgath spent the last of his strength in a mighty attack to break the siege and escape. Fleeing through shadow, he came to the "Eighth Plane" (?), the lifeless world on which Bukrai lay. There he siezed the orb.

By the power of Bukrai, Morgath was able to utterly destroy his three enemies, but he too was lost. Gazing within the sphere, he was forever changed. Siem, the oldest and wisest of the lesser gods, warned him, saying,

> "Restore the dark orb and I shall grant thee forgetfulness, for he that takes it for his own shall know no peace, 'though he may be a master of souls, shall his own be forfeit".

But Morgath spurned the advice, turning his back on Siem to study Bukrai and learn its secrets. Siem said to the other gods, "Now is heralded the end, for as he grows, shall grow the shadow and all the strength of man and beast and god may not avail".

Soon after, Siem isolated himself in the Blessed Realm, calling most of his folk to follow. The other gods made no attempt to recover Bukrai for Save-K'nor warned that the time was not right. Since the siezure, Morgath has gained some knowledge of the sphere's workings, but he has grown ever more insane, and has even violated the Concordat from time to time.

Agrik And Larani

In the age before the Concordat, the greatest rivalry was between the goddess Larani and Agrik, the Lord of Fire. Larani valued the freedom and joys of mortalkind and Agrik treasured power above all else. The armies of Agrik, led by fiery demons, pillaged the worlds and fought often with the knights of the Shildmaiden. Demons, demigods and mortals were slain as worlds were laid waste.

Ahnu And Dhivu

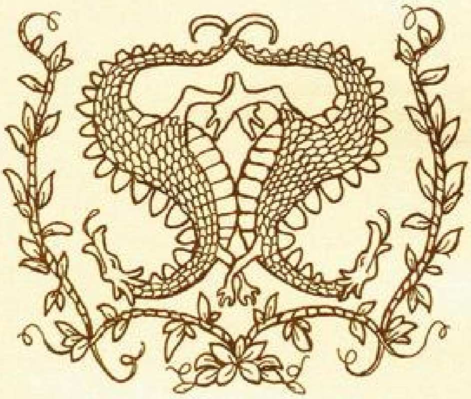
There came an impasse in the war and Larani resolved to turn the tide. Calling upon the craft of Ilvir, and lore stolen from Save-K'nor, the Sage of Heaven, she built a new god to champion her cause. This god she called Ahnu, first of the dragons. Ahnu was a mighty, graceful beast, fueled by fires from the heart of Yashain and able to ride the winds on majestic wings.

Larani won Ahnu's loyalty by love and sent him forth to Agrik's fortress Balgashang to turn her enemy's fiery weapons against him. Ahnu breathed mightily upon the towers of Balgashang, and its warlord was afraid, for the weapons to fight fire were repugnant to him and beyond his ken and control.

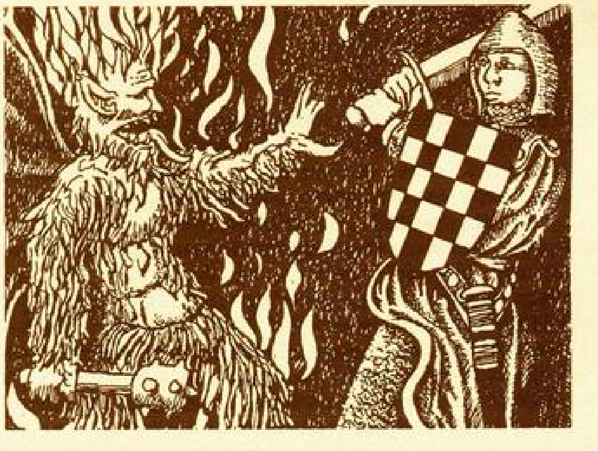
Morgath, however, decided that he did not desire the fall of Balgashang and, gazing within Bukrai, drew upon his own lore to create a mirror image of Ahnu, which he called Dhivu. But where Ahnu was a creature of primal fire, Dhivu contained a tiny part of the icy void. Her strength was that of the glacier, her breath the blizzard. Morgath set the compulsion of Bukrai upon her and sent her forth to battle Ahnu.

But once she came to Balgashang, beyond the power of the dark orb, and looked upon Ahnu, she forgot the shadow and was free. Ahnu and Dhivu gazed upon each other and perceived beauty. The great dragons betrayed their creators and fled to the mortal worlds.

Ahnu and Dhivu were of fire and ice and the consumation of their love was painful. Each touch destroyed them both, and when they were done they lay lifelessly entwined. Then Peoni, the gentle maiden of Valon, took mercy upon them and shed tears above them. She brought forth the eggs of dragonkind and set them safe upon mortal worlds. Ahnu she set among the stars, and Dhivu she revived, placing her upon Kethira in the land of Ivae. Each thousand years they would change places, for never could they meet again. And their seed grew and prospered.



The Duel Of Khamar



After Ahnu and Dhivu failed to resolve the issue, Agrik evolved his own plan. He went to a place called Khamar and there lay in ambush for Larani. Leaping forth with his mighty mace, he surprised the goddess, saying, "...Now breathe thy last, sister, for I am become death, the bane of worlds". The battle lasted long, and Khamar was devastated, but eventually Agrik smote Larani and near slew her. But Peoni loved the Lady of Paladins and used her healing powers to restore her. The Shildmaiden recovered, taking, for the first time, the aspect of the "Terrible Lady of Flowing Red". Her anger was great and, with Avarkiel her great sword, she cut the claws from Agrik's hand. Larani was about to slay Agrik, but Peoni interceded saying, "By the life I gave thee, stay thy hand". Larani deferred to her saviour and even went so far as to offer Agrik her hand, but Agrik denied her saying, "Shall I take thy hand, as trophy of my victory. For that will come. 'Though the worlds expire, and stagnant peace prevail a thousand million aeons shall I remember". Peoni offered to heal the sundered claws, but Agrik spurned her: "And how better may I recall this day than to carry always the mark of betrayal?".

The Sundered Claws And The Blood Of Fire

As Agrik stood brooding at Khamar after the departure of the two goddesses, the god Ilvir came and spoke to him.

> "A bargain shall I make my brother. Look upon the ground, thou did shed eight drops of thy blood. With my cunning, if thou desirest, shall I make thee sons in thy own image, loyal to do thy will."

Agrik had never had allies in whom he could safely trust, but he was suspicious.

> "How shall I know that this is no assassin's plot, craven one, for who shall love the mightiest of the gods?"

To this Ilvir answered,

> "Trust whomever thou will immodest one. Have thou the craft to bring forth such as I describe? For my part, I have need of thy lost talons, I do this not for love of thee. You may fear what thou will. I have offered thee true. Decide."

After brief reflection, the bargain was made. Ilvir used his craft upon the blood and birthed the V'hir, fiery demons in Agrik's image, as loyal as sons. Agrik ordered his demons to slay Ilvir, but they would not. Ilvir explained.

> "Am I then so foolish? Thy sons shall be as slaves in all but this: Never shall they harm their maker, and as I command, shall they perish. Now keep or break thy bargain."

Agrik gazed upon his children, and although they had only penultimate loyalty, he admired them. Reluctantly he surrendered the claws.

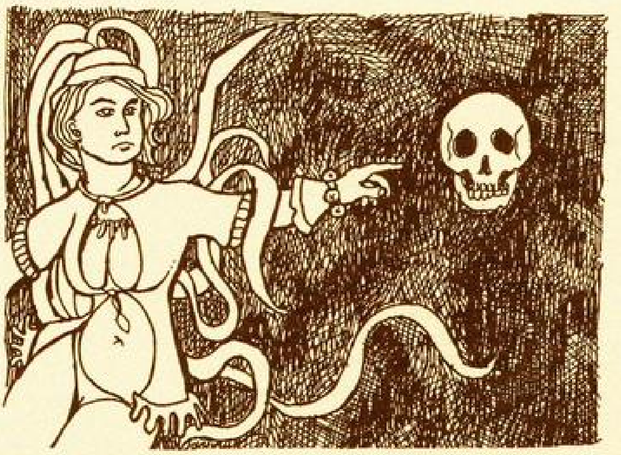
Ilvir And His Children

From the earliest times, the craft of Ilvir was great. Of all the gods, he had the greatest knowledge of the mortal races, except only for the folk of Siem, the elder peoples, the elves and dwarves. Others would come to him, saying, "make for me an army of thy craft", or "build a creature that can walk in shadow and do my bidding". Always he demanded the same payment of the gods: "give to me a portion of thy godly flesh as price, and what thou desirest is thyne". As time passed, Ilvir amassed varieties of divine flesh, and from these he made his own creatures. The gods were little concerned about Ilvir's strange lifeforms, for they seemed nothing more than harmless curiosities.

Ilvir had long coveted a part of Agrik to complete a treasured recipe. When he acquired the sundered claws, his plans were made. After the Concordat, he journeyed to Araka-Kalai, located "...on two worlds" and there he made his home. He made a myriad of strange creatures, some to serve him, some to teach him the ineluctable meaning of life itself (a still elusive concept) and some simply to glorify his art. In this, Ilvir has mostly withdrawn from the affairs of the gods, and seems to have diminished somewhat. At Araka-Kalai, he broods over his obscure purposes, the god that abides. Only rarely does he act, but his creatures range far and wide, a tribute to Ilvir's unique art, but still a mockery of true life whose creation is beyond even the gods.

Halea And The Thief Of Heaven

The goddess Halea was always vain of her form, and jealous of her possessions. Once, after the Concordat, the god Naveh desired her. He stole many treasures to enrich her hoards, and went to her saying, "lie with me". But Naveh was vague of form, frightening to behold, and Halea was cruel, saying, "Not in the darkest depths of the places between the worlds could I bear thy visage". Naveh was so much in love with the goddess that he used his great skill to make a mask, the "Shinkra-Akra". This he carved from the jewel-heart of a great mountain. It was in the form of a skull, and symbolized the transient nature of all things. Still, Halea spurned him, and Naveh swore revenge.



The Thief of Heaven crept into Halea's Crimson Chamber and stole her favourite pet, the beautiful black cat Dekejis, whom he blinded and castrated. Halea was furious when Dekejis was returned, "thou hast marred the beauty of my perfect feline", she said. She cast out the cat and demanded recompense from Naveh. But Naveh said, "the price is paid for there is a lesson for thee in this". Halea sought the arbitration of Save-K'nor, who told her that there was indeed a lesson at least equal in value to Halea's injury. This gave the goddess pause, and the dispute was allowed to die without further violence.

Naveh, meanwhile, took pity on Dekejis and took him in, promising him rewards to compensate for his injuries. Placing red fires where his eyes had been, Naveh gave the feline the power to perceive heat, to see in darkness. He also promised him opportunities to consume the genitals of his mortal victims which would eventually restore his own lost organs. While Dekejis consumes such delicacies with relish, the truth of the promise is yet to be proven.

Lord of the Four Horsemen, Master of the V'hir, Immortal Warlord of Balgashang, Breeder of Plague, Squallor and Decay, The Reasonless Reaper, Tyrant of the Foul Chamber, He Who Knows the Ten Thousand Ways."

The attitudes of the evil war god are difficult to understand. Agrik is the breeder of war for its own sake, the deity of those who enjoy rapine, pillage, cruelty and destruction. Agrik's element is fire; this is what his adherents serve; this is what he commands.

AGRIK AND MANRASUSHA

The amoral First God of primal fire is commonly called Manrasusha, he who cleanses and destroys, kills and comforts. Early dogma saw Agrik as his servant who nurtured and appeased him through sacrifice. Many of Agrik's followers believe that his coming to an understanding with Manrasusha saved Kelestia.

The ineluctable nature of the First Gods inevitably led to a divergence of metaphysical views and a confusion of identity between Agrik and Manrasusha. How the notion arose that Manrasusha required the blood of mortals is a mystery. Considering the general indifference of the First Gods, it is likely that mortal sacrifice is to sate the thirst of Agrik.

Agrik is most commonly portrayed as a mighty humanoid figure shrouded in crimson flame, with leathery, scalloped wings, cloven hooves and razor sharp claws. Two claws were severed from his left hand by the goddess Larani in an ancient dispute. Agrik will never forget this indignity. Only the terms of the Concordat of the Illimitable Tome deter him from seeking revenge. Some believe that he will eventually attempt to assassinate the goddess regardless of the consequences. The emnity carries over to the mortal followers of both deities.

There is little other record of active hostility between Agrik and other members of the Kethiran Pantheon. Only the followers of Larani are singled out for special attention. Otherwise, Agrikans loot, pillage, ravage and torture without discrimination.

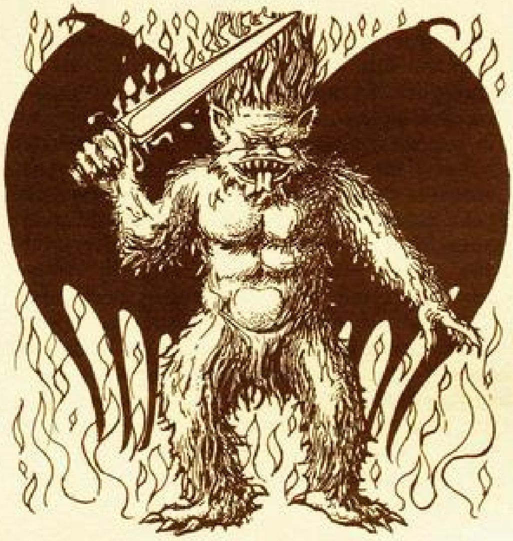
Agrik is one of the greatest warriors of the gods, although he is known for his unchivalrous methods. His favourite weapons are Gashang the "Emperor of Flame", his flaming mace capable of inflicting "the myriad voices of pain", and Sycanus, the sickle with which he cuts the hearts and souls of men from their bodies. He also owns Armahnh, a great whip with which he strikes the ground with the sound of thunder.

PAMESHLU

Demon Pameshlu the Insatiable is Agrik's chief underling. He is the lord of frenzy and excess, and his appetite for blood is unrivalled. He is commonly portrayed as an ordinary human in laquered black armour, bearing his broadsword, Emyn, and his shield, Okayra. The Pamesani Games are named in his honour.

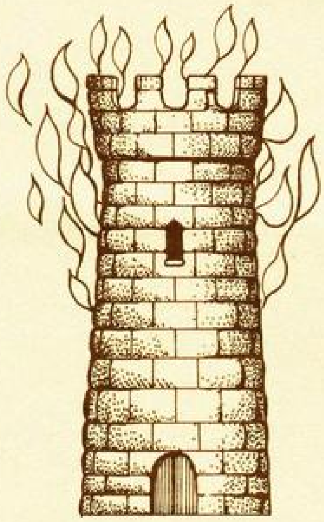
THE V'HIR

The best known of the semi-divine servants of Agrik are the Eight Demons known as the V'hir. Sometimes called the sons of Agrik, the V'hir are said to have sprung from eight drops of blood that fell when Larani cut the claws from Agrik's hand. In appearance, the V'hir are much like Agrik, although smaller and less powerful. Nevertheless, they are often confused with the god by those unfortunate enough to encounter them.



BALGASHANG AND AK-SYT

Agrik dwells in his great fortress of Balgashang among his attendant V'hir. Somewhere within the castle is Ak-Syt, the dreaded chamber of tortures. The fortress' location is uncertain and it may actually exist in several places/worlds at once. Many believe it to be at the fiery heart of Kethira, but the majority of priests hold that it is located somewhere on Yashain.



ORIGINS OF THE CHURCH

Ilpylen: The First Prophet

Ilpylen, who brought word of Agrik to men, was a warrior of the Kuldrh tribe, whose village was on the slope of a dormant volcano somewhere in the heart of Lythia. Around 1500 BT, the volcano became active, threatening to destroy the village, and the chieftain took the opportunity to rid the tribe of Ilpylen's constant boasts and violence. Telling him to make his peace with the volcano before returning, Ilpylen was driven up the mountain path with a half dozen spears at his back. An hour later, when Ilpylen was (presumably) within the crater, the volcano erupted. Strangely, only the houses of the chieftain and of the six warriors who had escorted Ilpylen to his doom were destroyed. When Ilpylen returned from the mountain, the villagers thought they saw fiery demons at his heels.

Ilpylen spoke from the ruins of the chief's house, saying that the mountain was one of many gateways to the realm of "...he who appeases the fiery doom... The root of the world is the root of all... if the roots are not nurtured, the plant will die..." Legend has it that Ilpylen performed several miracles in support of his claim to have communed with Agrik.

Ilpylen recruited eight acolytes to help him worship. The ceremony of appeasment required that a tribesman be siezed from the village to battle Ilpylen on the crater's rim; he who fell through the "gateway" was the sacrifice. Ilpylen was a superb fighter. Eventually, the village grew so short of men that it ceased to be viable; the survivors dispersed, carrying the tale of Ilpylen throughout the region. Charging his followers with some final instructions, Ilpylen mounted the summit alone and was never seen again.

Moralin: The Balefire Chronicle

All that survives of the early history of the church of Agrik is contained in the Balefire Chronicle, written by Moralin, the greatest of Ilplyen's eight acolytes. From the village of the Kuldrh, the eight made their separate ways to lay 888 cairns at the corners of the world, to appease the "gates of fire" and to open new ones. Each took a copy of the Balefire Chronicle which contained the legacy of Ilpylen.

EARLY CHURCH

Only a common object of worship and the Balefire Chronicle united the early church, and the latter was liberally interpreted by its guardians. The eight disciples travelled without haste, letting the word of their doings precede them. Each selected eight followers and these parties split up when the leader died, each acolyte bearing an interpreted copy of the first chronicle and the history of their group. Many groups were, of course, lost.

The church never made any attempt to convert masses of the population. The rituals of "nurturing the root" were tasks for skillful and dedicated hands. Few could have the temperament or inclination to become priests of Agrik. At first, only the finest warriors were admitted to the priesthood. The movement also attracted scholars whose bent was toward administration and ritual rather than the martial arts. Within a millenium, two specialized castes had developed. The priests were guardians of the Balefire Chronicles, which had become a synonym for archives, and the "Terahni" warriors were protectors of the priests; most bands contained several (often eight) Terahni in addition to its leader and eight acolytes. But the martial ideal has survived, and most priests still have skill at arms.

Dogma was tempered by exposure to larger populations. The more aggressive bands were too antisocial to survive, and were "martyred" by persons outraged by wanton violence. Those who adapted to moderation survived and sometimes prospered.

Purists travelled in compact bands, erecting and repairing the 888 cairns. Some bands incorporated wagons and a whole panoply of followers. Some made their ceremonies public, offering a prize to any warrior who could defeat the band's champion, and staging ritual combat in village squares. When their champion was slain, the priests often considered it a good sacrifice and the victor was set free. Eventually most bands settled and built temples to house their archives and hide their increasingly complex rituals from prying eyes.

To prosper, the church had to accept a wider following and this prompted the priesthood to invent spectacular rituals which had very little to do with the original ideals of the church, but certainly attracted a sizable laity. Hence came a change in attitude towards the general population. Lay adherents were allowed to attend certain rituals and make donations. The temples provided religious justification for those who practiced violence and attracted warriors who enjoyed the brutality of war. The political, military and financial support of these worshippers was eagerly accepted by pragmatic priests. The laity also provided a pool from which Terahni and priests might be recruited.

ORGANIZATION

Thus developed three distinct castes of the followers of Agrik: The priests, who governed and kept their theology closely guarded, the Terahni who served as the secular arm, and the laity, viewed by the priesthood as a source of funds, recruitment, and political support.

The rise of complex societies in Lythia was mirrored in the church. The original structure of one priest and eight acolytes remained, but the eight became masters with special responsibilities. As administration grew burdensome, they took assistants; schools were founded to train priests. The wandering band was slowly replaced by the temple hierarchy.

Feudalism provided a model for the Terahni. The priests organized their warriors into fighting-orders. When a temple prospered it founded new houses; sometimes control was maintained, more often the new temple declared independence. Since most temples had their own Terahni, bloodshed was common.

It was not only the numerous philosophical differences that fostered disputes within the church. Agrikanism seemed to attract men as much concerned with power for its own sake as with theology. Competition between orders and temples was accepted, even encouraged. Often, violence was perceived as an act of worship in itself, and no adherent could make a greater sacrifice than his own life.

TEMPLE HIERARCHY

The responsibilites of the priests within a temple vary from one to another, but an idealized model can be presented.

The Viriahn (High Priest)

The High Priest is the master of the temple. In regions with strong central authority, the Viriahn is appointed by the bishop. Elsewhere, the High Priest is elected for life by the temple masters.

THE APERANI (MASTERS)

There are usually eight masters, each with his own area of concern. Most masters find their spheres overlapping those of their colleagues, and competition is ceaseless, although usually covert. The Aperani are usually appointed by the High Priest.

Aperalis (Master of Acolytes)

Responsible for training apprentice priests. The Aperalis assigns acolytes to the other masters and helps insure that the temple runs smoothly.

Apervisha (Master of Maintenance)

The master reponsible for the daily running of the kitchen, cleaning, etc. Acolytes are assigned to assist the Apervisha and are supervised by his lieutenants.

Aperphelis (Master of Treasures)

Responsible for the temple's wealth and special artifacts. The Aperphelis may share responsiblilty for the armoury with the Master of the Middle Discipline. There may also be disputes with the Master of Archives.

Apersuphur (Master of Archives)

The master in charge of the temple records. He holds the Balefire Chronicle(s) and has responsiblity for most written works, but must contend with the Master of Treasures for jurisdiction over some valuable items.

Aperahkai (Master of Propagation)

The master responsible for the temple's relation with the community. In this he must share power with the Masters of the Middle and Low Disciplines. The Aperahkai commands a number of spies and may hold the ear of the local government.

Aperagris (Master of the High Discipline)

The priest who leads most rituals of the High Discipline. He has his own archives and disputes authority and dogma with the masters of the Middle and Low Disciplines. Important ceremonies may be led by the High Priest; this is another cause for jealousy. The Aperagris sets tests for acolytes.

Aperterahn (Master of the Middle Discipline)

The master in charge of relations with the Terahni. If he lacks competence, the temple's warriors may be virtually independent. The Aperterahn leads special ceremonies for the Terahni, and has a say in their recruitment; competition may lead to disputes with the Master of the High Discipline.

Aperhanar (Master of the Low Discipline)

The priest who usually leads the "open" ceremonies and deals with most lay supplicants. The Aperhanar also conducts evangelical activities and may have spies in the community at large.

The Heruchai (Lietenants)

The number of Heruchai varies from one temple to another. They rank between acolyte and master and are assigned to one of the Aperani. A lieutenant of the Aperterahn would be called an Aperterahnherucha, for example. Appointments are made by the High Priest with advice from the Masters of Acolytes and High Discipline. Many Heruchai spy on their masters for other Aperani. The assignment and covert recruitment of Heruchai is one of the temple's most complex and dangerous games. The true possessor of the most Heruchai is the likely successor to the High Priest.

The Agnichari (Acolytes)

These are usually recruited at the age of sixteen to twenty, by the Master of High Discipline or the Master of Acolytes, from the laity or Terahni, but the process is open to interference from any Aperani. They are trained in martial arts and learn ritual and dogma by rote, but most of their time is spent at menial tasks. The acolyte is periodically tested by the Master of the High Discipline. This serves to gauge and toughen the mettle of acolytes and to rid the temple of troublemakers. If the acolyte agrees to spy for the Aperagris, his tests may be easier. Tests may vary from a recitation of ritual to a quest halfway across the world to wrest an artifact from a fearsome foe. It is the responsibility of the Master of Acolytes to coordinate training under various masters and lieutenants so that they can pass tests, but if he is unimpressed by the acolyte's "loyalty" and competence, he will make less effort. Because of the power struggle behind the scenes, most acolytes are forced into the camp of at least one Aperani during their first few months.

Eventually, if he survives, the acolyte will be promoted to the rank of Heruchai. If he shows skill at arms, he may be transferred to the Terahni.

THE CENTRAL AUTHORITY

The fractious origins of the Agrikan temples long prevented the establishment of a central authority, but in the more densely populated regions, where more temples were established, some high priests came to dominate the district. By 300 TR, the temple of Lysara in Azeryan had come to dominate the Agrikan church throughout most of that Empire. By 450 TR, most Lythian temples had acknowledged Lysaran supremacy to some degree. Lysara, on the edge of the Azeryani Drylands, began as a temple and grew into a city/enclave almost independent of imperial authority and dedicated to Agrikanism.

The Amanasurif (The Pontiff)

The most powerful priest of Agrik dwells in Lysara where he is a powerful secular lord, collecting revenues from temples and other church properties throughout Azeryan and the rest of Lythia. Most Agrikans acknowledge that he has a special relationship with the diety, but not all orders recognize his infallibility.

The High Corcuno (Senior Cardinals)

The High Curcuno serves as a kind of pontiff's cabinet. Its eight members advise the Amanasurif and are the government of the church estates. They are chosen by the pontiff from the Low Curcuno. When the pontiff dies, his successor is most often one of the High Curcuno.

The Low Curcuno (Cardinals)

The great enclave of the church of Agrik consists of the primates and bishops, and enough additional appointees to bring the number to eighty eight. When the pontiff dies, the Low Curcuno elects his successor, although few enclaves are attended by everyone who is eligible. Members travelling to Lysara are frequently ambushed by hostile groups. Such occasions are also used to review/devise the church's international policy. Most offices in the government of Lysara and the church estates are filled by members of the Curcunos who therefore head the secular and sacred bureaucracy.

THE REGIONAL AUTHORITY

The church of Agrik divides the known world into primacies and bishoprics. Primates and bishops are the pontiff's voice, and (theoretically) the supreme authority within their juridictions. The wealth and power of these officers depends on the number of adherents in the region, the legal status of the church, and so on. The autonomy of the region is usually a function of its distance from Lysara.

Apalankh (Primate)

A Primate is generally responsible for the Agrikan church of an entire country. In some cases, several countries are grouped into a single primacy, as is the case with the nations of Harn. The primate is usually allowed to appoint bishops, and may also select the high priests of the temples in his primacy.

Kemelras (Bishop)

A bishop is the governor of an ecclesiastical subprovince, containing one or more temples. Some bishops hold many temples and are wealthier than primates. The power of the bishop is in inverse proportion to that of his primate. If the primate (and temples) are weak, the bishop may freely appoint his own followers to vacant positions. Otherwise, the primate usually takes a major role in selections.

Ulankh (Free Priest)

This is roughly equivalent to Aperani. Ulankhs may be appointed by bishops, primates, members of the High Curcuno, or the pontiff. Their status depends on who appoints them. Some hold offices within the primacy, bishopric or central bureaucracy. Ulankhs serve as spies, inspectors and emissaries. Members of the priesthood who serve well may be made Ulankh and given licence to wander freely. Often, they are created to ease the burden on the church resources, since, while an Ulankh may receive food and accomodation at any temple, he may not remain for more than eight days and nights in any month. Ulankh's usually renounce any connection with temple or order; their allegiance is directly to the pontiff (in practice, more often to their appointer).

CLERICAL ORDERS

A clerical order is a group of temples/priests united by common dogma, activity or policy, in essence, a political or religious faction. Many orders are limited to a single temple, some have many temples, a few have no temples at all and function as (often covert) wandering bands. Most orders have a headquarters and the priests of this chief temple usually hold the high offices of the order. Clerical orders are founded as a result of theological (or political) differences, or under a special charter from high authority. In the latter case, the order is usually given a specific task, such as the establishment of the church in a previously unorganized region, or the military defeat of some nation or district. Almost all clerical orders maintain their own fighting orders.

Clerical orders have little official significance. They are associations independent of the legitimate hierarchy. In practice, however, they are important pressure groups, and where there is little in the way of regional authority (as in Ivinia and Harn, for example) clerical orders may be the highest effective organizational level.

Senesharil (Clerical Grandmaster)

The political and inspirational leader of the order, is often more concerned with political matters than with the running of his own temple. His role is to provide guidance as to how the directives of the legitimate hierarchy can best be carried out. In theory, therefore, his function is interpretive rather than theological. Some Senesharil are appointed by the Pontiff or Primate, some are elected by the order's High Priests; this depends on the order's charter or the degree of organization in the region.

Markithra (Deputy Grandmaster)

If the Senesharil is busy with other concerns, his deputy substitutes for him. In large orders, there may be several deputies. Some may travel constantly on tours of inspection from one temple to another. Markithras are selected from the Aperani of the order.

FIGHTING ORDERS

Almost every clerical order sponsors, and theoretically commands, its own Terahni. Their organization reflects the culture in which they are situated. In feudal states, Agrikan fighting orders consist of "knights" and often a commonality. In imperial states, they may copy legionary ranks. In the church hierarchy, the Terahni rank in status between the laity and priesthood. They serve as temple guards, assassins, spies, and armies when their temples are at war. The chapter house also serves as a kind of social club for members of the order.

A fighting order is the secular equivalent of the clerical order. Instead of temples, it has chapter houses which vary in size and function. Some fighting orders are limited to a single barracks on the grounds of its sponsor's temple. Some have dozens of manors, castles, fortresses, and hundreds of "knights" and commoners. Many are able to conduct military campaigns, and they often achieve a high degree of independence. The headquarters of a fighting order are usually near the seat of its sponsoring clerical order. Most fighting orders have part time and full time members. The former are "called up" only in time of need and are generally of independent means.

Akarata & Tenaka (Grandmaster and Deputy)

The Akarata is the commander in chief of a fighting order. Although he is not a priest, he has far more command of rituals than do most laymen. He deals with the clerical grandmaster and organizes his command in any manner he sees fit. He may be assisted by a number of Tenakas (deputies). If the order wishes to ingratiate itself with local government, it may appoint the king (etc.) to the office. In such cases, he would be invited to preside over certain ceremonies, but the running of the order would be done by a deputy. The Akarata is is usually appointed by his clerical grandmaster, on the "advice" of the ranking officers.

Meketa (High Commander)

The commander of an independent chapter house or temple guard. He takes orders from the head of his order. If he commands a temple garrison, he is also subject to the authority of the High Priest and the Master of the Middle Discipline.

Telmen (Commander)

A "knight-commander" of an order. Telmen are subordinate to the Meketa, perhaps commanding a small unit of the order's forces, or taking responsibility for duties to do with the running of the chapter (quartermaster, etc.).

Dotelen (Subcommander)

A deputy Telmen. These are appointed over small units and to assist the Telmen. They are given various duties.

Haragki (Knight)

A noble member of the order. These "knights" rank below the preceding officers and above any commonality.

Laumak (Soldier)

A member of the commonality of the order. These are warriors of (otherwise) low social status. There may be corporals (Ainlaumaks) and sergeants (T'kelans), but officers in Agrikan fighting orders are always noble.

Honorary Status

Any of the four preceding ranks may have their titles prefixed with the term "Anas-", indicative of an honourary or part time status. "Anasi" can be regarded as a kind of reserve. They have the right to occasional accomodation at the order's houses, and may use them as social clubs.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Methods of worship vary somewhat between the innumerable clerical orders, but certain practices are constant. Human sacrifice is a common feature. In the Middle and Low Disciplines, man to man and man to beast combat is stressed, but the High Discipline may be more sinister (and less fair).

THE BALEFIRE DISCIPLINES

Ceremonies fall into three groups, corresponding to the three castes of worshippers. In general, rituals of the Low Discipline may be attended by any adherent, although few priests or Terahni bother; those of the Middle Discipline are attended by priests and the Terahni and ceremonies of the High Discipline may be attended only by priests.

Low Ceremonies

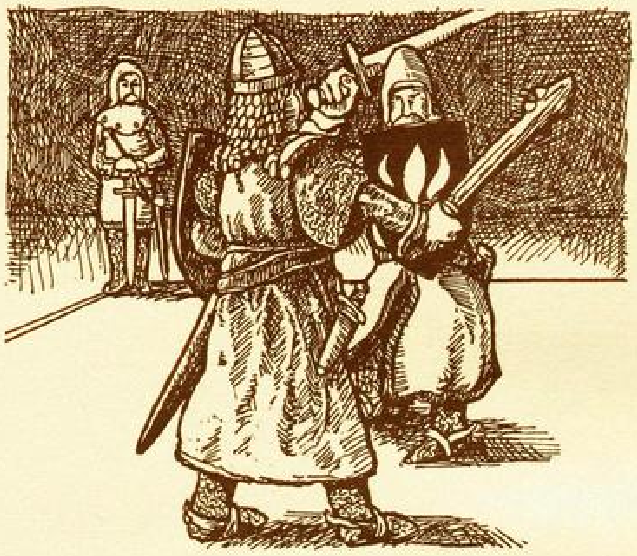
These are the simplest. Most lay masses consist of mutual dedication to the deity and include canted, responsive prayer and a real or symbolic sacrifice by combat. Wealthier temples often insert pyrotechnic displays to enhance the spectacle. Most temples hold lay mass on the eighth of each month.

Temples contain a succession of chambers each closer to the "heart" of the temple and more elaborate than the last. Those who wish to worship on their own (or in small groups) make a donation and are guided to the chamber corresponding to the size of their offering. The first chamber is devoid of artifacts except for a small altar and bowl. The last (usually the eighth) chamber is a richly decorated shrine in which the high priest himself will assist supplicants to attract the deity's attention.

The private ceremony incorporates standard prayer and meditation, designed to rededicate the adherent. Private ablutions are done with sand (powdered lava if available) never with water. Sulphur is often burned in small quantities.

Middle Ceremonies

In addition to private dedications, the Terahni practice elaborate reenactments of mythological and historical combats. The members of the order form an octagon within which two or more members fight. The actors will sacrifice speed to ensure that the moves are precise. The Master of the Middle Discipline voices a invocation, and the audience responds on cue. These physical ceremonies are as complex as verbal recitations, and the Terahni are sufficiently familiar with the routines to appreciate the quality of the performance. The reenactments are intended to renew faith.



High Ceremonies

The priests also use martial ritual, often acting out battles that are planned or anticipated. Some temples have amassed a series of hypothetical encounters that supposedly portray history centuries into the future. The most significant "predictive" battle is when Agrik slays Larani at the end of the Great Vendetta. The predictions are not remarkably accurate, but the rituals serve as a kind of contingency planning. Priestly combats often involve the use of a captive or slave, bedecked in the garment of an enemy. Such encounters are fought to the death.

On other occasions, the priest forfeit combat and conduct a more sinister kind of human sacrifice. The victim is usually prepared for the ritual by several hours of "ceremonial" torture to the chanting of the priests. All, or part of the victim is consumed by fire. The howls of the sacrifice, the use of fire and the ceremonial chanting are believed to be the best method of attracting the deity's attention. A student of the High Discipline will learn as many of the "Ten Thousand Ways" of inflicting pain as possible.

Surikal (The Secret Tongue)

The church of Agrik has taken pains to conserve its own private language. Originally based on Kuldrh, Surikal is intentionally complex and irregular. There are no texts on Surikal; knowledge is passed verbally from one generation to the next. Mastery of the language is closely associated with mastery of the ritual in such a way that the more grammar and vocabulary an individual knows, the greater his ability to perform rituals. The laity are taught enough to respond appropriately to the cants of priests. The nature of the church has led to the development of dozens of dialects, to the point that priests from different regions have difficulty understanding each other, but the ascendency of Lysara has enabled the central authority to impose a degree of uniformity.

Ukhila: The Octennial Games

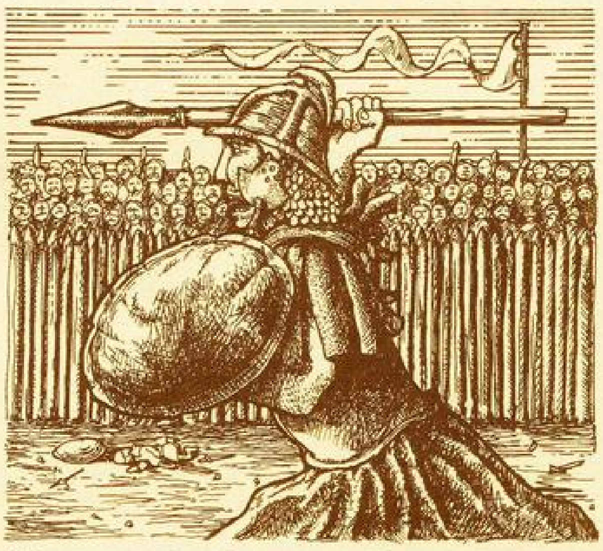
Every eight years (most recently in 714) thousands of priests, Terani and laymen gather at Lysara to participate in the "Ukhila". The games last eight days and begin on the first of Agrazhar. Rituals, orgies, conferences and tournaments are held in the first six days. The seventh and eighth days are devoted to "special" entertainment. In the years preceding the Ukhila, a small town is constructed just outside Lysara. It is populated with slaves and stocked with hidden treasure. On the seventh day the warriors divide into two armies and engage in battle. The victors earn the privilege of sacking the town.

The Pakara

Each attending order appoints a champion to engage in the Pakara, a tournament to test individual prowess. In the first six days of the games, the champions meet in mortal combat. The final day of Ukhila, the feast of Agrik, is devoted to a mass ceremony in the great amphitheatre. During this ritual, the last two survivors of the Pakara meet. This duel earns its victor the title "Maparas", Warrior Supreme, and the custody of Juka-Melbesa, an allegedly enchanted sword, for the next eight years. The Maparas is the champion of the church, one of the most feared warriors of the known world. The Maparas must return to defend his title, but no one has ever won twice.

The Pamesani

The Ukhila is probably the world's greatest "tournament". The church also sponsors lesser spectacles. The Order of the Octagonal Pit and its fighting order, Demon Pameshlu the Insatiable, organize regular public games in many locales, often building arenas for the purpose. Generally these are far more than gladitorial events. The bloodletting and depravity seems unbounded. Because of this, the games are widely banned. The Pamesani of Azeryan are recognized either as the most dramatic or the most grotesque, depending on one's point of view.



CANON LAW

The church of Agrik settles most internal disputes by dueling. If temple policy is involved, affecting the higher priesthood, a hearing before the high priest or grandmaster may be called. Decisions tend to be summary and fatal. The Pamesani arena is used, whenever possible, for the resolution of such issues.

SYMBOLS AND REGALIA

The number eight and the colours orange and black have particular significance for worshippers of Agrik. The number is symbolic of the emnity with Larani, and the number has acquired considerable mystical import. Early priests spoke often of the eight corners of the world, and the 888 (sometimes 8888) cairns, but these concepts have lost most of their significance. More recently, the octagonal pit has acquired particular ritual importance. The original pit is said to lie within Balgashang and to open onto the heart of Manrasusha. By the same token, the octagonal pits located in many Agrikan temples are said to open into the heart of Agrik. The pits are the centrepiece of many rituals and sacrifices are cast in, sometimes by elaborate mechanisms. Ritual combat is often staged on a narrow walkway over the flaming pit.

CALENDAR

The most important day of the Agrikan year is the Feast of Balefire on the 8th of Agrazhar. Many bonfires are lit and things are roasted...

GEOGRAPHY

Agrik is worshiped throughout Lythia in one form or another, but in many regions, such as Kanday, Kaldor, Melderyn, Emelryne and Trierzon, the practice is illegal and, therefore, covert. Wandering bands may still be found in wilderness regions such as Quarphor, Reksyna and the Hepekerian Desert. The greatest concentration of temples is in Azeryan. In Karejia and the East the worship of Agrik has declined with the growth of commerce. On Harn, worship is concentrated in the Thardic Republic and the Kingdom of Rethem.

THE HARNIC CHURCH

As of 720 there are seven clerical orders of the church of Agrik on Harn; each sponsors its own fighting-order. The Harnic Agrikan primate is the grandmaster of the Order of Mamaka the Master of Steel; his seat is located in Golotha. The clerical orders and their sponsored fighting orders are described below.

Eight Demons, Order of the

One of two female clerical orders, the order is notorious for sexual-torture, and sacrifice of male captives. The order was established in 714 when it split from the order of Herpa the Mace. The headquarters of the order is in Shiran; other temples are at Coranan and Golotha. The Senesharil of the order is Merele of Kantar, a ruthless intriguer. She is about forty and even by the standards of the Agrikan church she is considered diabolically cruel and sadistic.

Cohorts of Gashang, Order of the

Interestingly, while its sponsoring clerical order is restricted to women, the Cohorts of Gashang is open only to males. The headquarters of the order are at Themeson. The order's formal name is the "Cohorts of Gashang the Emperor of Flame", but this is seldom used. The Cohorts of Gashang are the result of the same theological/political dispute that created the Order of the Eight Demons. The Haragki and Laumak of the Order often deliver captives to the tender mercies of its parent clerical order in Golotha, Shiran and Coranan; most Harnians tend to avoid them. The Akarata of the order is Crasel of Merbed.

Fuming Gate, Order of the

The Fuming Gate's only major temple is in Golotha. Since Ezar's War, and the fiascos suffered therein by the Copper Hook, the order has been in steady decline. It is doubtful that the Golotha headquarters hold more than a dozen priests. The Senesharil of the order is Julah of Gathin.

Company Of The Copper Hook, Order of the

Established in 623 under the sponsorship of the clerical Order of the Fuming Gate. After several decades of aimless pillage and poverty, the order swore fealty to King Arlun of Rethem in 641, and were granted lands by King Nemiran in 681. The next year, the order used its bases at Menekod, Hyen, Dunir and Selvos to launch an attack on the Kandian keep at Imiden, starting a fifteen year conflict that was to be named Ezar's War after their Akarata. With the defeat of Rethem and the peace of Selvos in 697, the lands of the Company of the Copper Hook have been reduced to Hyen keep. The order has never recognised the Peace of Selvos and has continued to skirmish against Kandian units for the last 23 years. The Akarata of the order is Marag of Yeredar, a fifty two year old man whose sad and depressed demeanor belies a clever and scheming mind.

Herpa The Mace, Order of the

The most mystical of the Harnic Agrikan orders. It is also involved in politics, favouring a crusade against the rest of Harn. Its main temple is in Golotha and it maintains a secret temple in Coranan, engaged in subversion. In 714, a faction broke off to form the Order of the Eight Demons. The Senesharil of the order is Andraz of Enald.

Red Shadows Of Herpa, Order of the

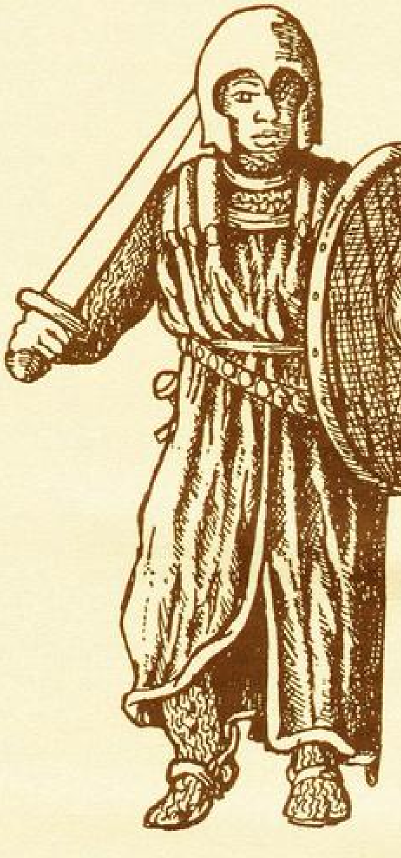
The order is headquartered at Menekai, in the Kingdom of Rethem. Like its sponsoring clerical order it favours a "holy" crusade against the rest of Harn. The order was granted its lands in 681. In 708, it sent a force across the Gomisen and siezed Themeson keep from the Thardic Republic. However, when a faction broke away to become the Order of the Cohorts of Gashang in 714, they took Themeson for their own. The Red Shadows are currently attempting to exterminate the Kubora tribesmen of Peran. In keeping with their policy of spreading-by-the-sword the word of Agrik, the order supports Chafin III, who is seen as a leader who might be able to unify Rethem and lead the crusade they favour. The Akarata of the order is Larga of Gydsilen, a coarse and brutish thug.

Kukshin, Order of the

One of the two Agrikan clerical orders which are restricted to women. The Order of Kukshin sponsors the unique female fighting-order, The Crimson Dancer. Both orders are of Thardic origin but since 701 they have been centered in Orbaal. This is the result of the Order of the Kukshin and the Order of the Crimson Dancer falling into official disfavour in Rethem after events occurring in Ezar's War. The Harnic order's primary temple is located at Quimen. The Senesharil is Marene of Tusyne.

Crimson Dancer, Order of the

The only female fighting-order of the church of Agrik. Despite its Thardic origin the Order holds no lands on Harn outside Orbaal. There is a hostel of the Order in Shiran but the isolated Orbaalese keep of Quimen has been the Order's headquarters since 701 when it deemed it wise to leave Rethem. The order draws most of its recruits from martially inclined women of Orbaal, disenchanted with an otherwise subservient role in society. The Akarata of the order is Baliela of Shernath. Fifty three years old, she is a resilient and merciless survivor of intrigue.



Mamaka The Master Of Steel, Order of the

The dominant clerical order of the Harnic Agrikan church. The Order's only temple is in Golotha and the Senesharil of the order has been the Agrikan primate for Harn for the past three decades. The present primate, Klyrdes of Bisidril, is also chairman of the Heptarchy of the city of Golotha. While he claims descent from the alleged bastard daughter of the prophet Balsha (see Morgath), his philosophical leanings are more conservative than were the prophet's. The main problem for the Harnic primate is to keep the various orders from tearing each other apart. Klyrdes, in 717, orchestrated the most recent in a series of "temple wars" wherein the temple of the Order of the Pillar of Fire in Golotha, along with most of its priests, was "mysteriously" burned. The near total destruction of an entire sect did, of course, merit the primate's "sincere condolences".

Warriors of Mameka, Order of the

The order has its headquarters at Bedenes keep on Rethem's northern border and periodically crusades against the Kuboran tribes of Peran. The primary ambition of the Warriors of Mameka is to re-establish a keep at the ruins of Kustan. Bedenes was allegedly granted to the order by King Nemiran of Rethem, although no record exists. It is more likely that the order siezed the district from its legal holder around 690 when the kings of Rethem were involved in a war with Kanday; the keep itself dates from 699. The Akarata of the order is Horab of Gerund, a violent sensualist.

Octagonal Pit, Order of the

Both this order and its sponsored fighting order are primarily concerned with operation of the Pamesani games in Golotha, Shiran and Coranan. The headquarters of this order are at Golotha. The Senesharil of the order is Varean of Akaim.

Demon Pameshlu The Insatiable, Order of the

The order holds no lands, serving primarily as guards, gladiators, beast and slave masters and administrators for its parent body which operates the Pamesani. The Akarat of the order is Tonwersa of Klaib.

Pillar Of Fire, Order of the

The order's only Harnic temple was razed during a "temple war" with the primate in 717. Only a few dozen priests of the order survived and have been in hiding ever since. They move secretly from one place to another, never reveal their identities to outsiders, and attempt to kill anyone who learns their secret. The Pillar of Fire intends to assassinate the primate at the first opportunity. It is generally accepted that the order was plotting to sieze the primacy when it was purged. The order's sponsored fighting order, the Companions of Roving Doom have not demonstrated a high degree of loyalty since the crisis. The Senesharil of the Harnic order is Balak of Rensi.

Companions Of Roving Doom, Order of the

The Order was established in 604 and helped Arlun the Barbarian to establish the Kingdom of Rethem. The order's house is Arketh, in the Kingdom of Rethem, from where Haragki of the order sally forth to commit acts of brutality and intimidation. Kings of Rethem have traditionally employed the order to "lean on trouble-makers", enchanted, no doubt, by their efficiency. Since the virtual destruction of the sponsoring clerical order in 717, the Companions of Roving Doom have effectively become an independant body. The Akarata of the order is Bremel of Kawaran.

THE IVINIAN CHURCH

The church of Agrik is relatively new to the northlands, but has become the most popular religion besides the worship of Sarajin. Ivinian lords have often found the Agrikan fighting orders to be useful temporary allies.

Kukshin, Order of the

The Kukshin and their sponsored fighting order have spread to Ivinia from Harn. In 710 the Orbaalese order sent missionaries to Ivinia where they have established temples in Beleka, Harling and Jarehm. Although the Harnic and Ivinian chapters operate as virtually independant organizations, there are close ties and relatively good relations between them. The Senesharil of the Ivinian order is Sulabryn of Larvenes.

Crimson Dancer, Order of the

Since 710 the order has been active in Ivinia where it maintains a headquarters in Beleka. The Akarata of the Ivinian order is Tamyne of Chukris, a relatively young twenty nine, and sometimes called the cruelest woman in Seldenbaal.

Pillar Of Fire, Order of the

The Pillar of Fire is one of the two Agrikan orders that has spread from Harn to Ivinia. In 673 members of the Order of the Pillar of Fire travelled to Hutheng Island to witness the eruption of Mount Geravek. Finding both the locale and the political climate of the north to their liking, clerics of the order founded a temple in Vulenheim in 677. They also maintain a small temple at the northern foot of Mount Geravek. Since the virtual destruction of the Harnic order in 717 the Ivinian order has inherited a few refugees. The order supports Menglana in its war with Ibanvaal; this is one cause of the considerable tension between the Pillar of Fire and the V'hirahn. The Senesharil of the Ivinian order is Petren of Tramabin.

Companions Of Roving Doom, Order of the

Since 677 there has been a chapter of the order in Ivinia, where their long tradition of violence and aggression is very appropriate to local politics. The headquarters of the Ivinian order are in Vulenheim; the Akarata is Zudsyr of Veld.

V'Hirahn, Order of the

This order originated in Azeryan where it was and is called the Order of Sedegar the Pitiless. It appeared in Ivinia in 633. Within a decade a bloody internal dispute in the order resulted in the murder of the founding leaders of the Ivinian branch and the creation of the Order of the V'hirahn in 644. There has been no official contact between the Ivinian order and the Azeryan order since that date. The Order of the V'hirahn is the largest and wealthiest Agrikan order in Ivinia and the grandmaster of the order claims the Agrikan primacy. The adherants of the order regard themselves as a purist elite, a high handed attitude that has led to several clashes with the rival Agrikan orders in Ivinia. The chief temple of the order is in Fuhreling, other temples can be found in Jarehm and Pelby. The order supports the Dagen of Ibanvaal in his war with Menglana.

Sable Claw, Order of the

The order is a renegade branch of the Azeryani fighting order called the Company of Kurriksor Lashwielder. It appeared in Ivinia in 633 and was quickly rocked by the violent internal strife of its sponsoring clerical order. In 644 a merciless purge of Azeryan "reactionaries" was carried out and the order took its present name.

The Empress of Opulence, the Queen of Pleasures and Self-Fulfilment, the Maker of Bargains, Guardian of the Treasure Hoards of Heaven, Enslaver of Hearts and Loins, Mistress of the Stolen Moment Forever Lost, Unchaste Lady of the Ten Forgotten Acts and the Ten Times Ten Secret Arts, Golden Temptress of the Crimson Chamber."

The Queen of Pleasures is commonly portrayed as a perfectly proportioned, sensuously lithesome, human female. Her true form is so beautiful as to drive men mad with passion. Halea has many aspects, among them, the innocent and helpless "maiden", the worldly sophisticate, and the canny usurer. But she is more than a symbol for sensuality, although she is often perceived as little more than this by ignorant outsiders. Non-adherents have a tendency to perceive Halea as a goddess of little wisdom, and her church as a shallow and spiritually bankrupt institution, but the goddess is the shrewdest of schemers, one who sometimes hides behind a facade of naivete.

Halea is deemed an easy deity to worship, for she demands no conventional morality of her adherents and is willing to bargain for her favours. The highest ethic for a Halean is fealty to the goddess. Traditional concepts of social evil, right and wrong, have little bearing.

THE SERVANTS OF HALEA

The Golden Temptress is directly served by her seven handmaidens. They are not worshipped for Halea brooks no rivals, but they are given a great measure of respect.

Dulcia (Princess of the Harmonic Cascade)

Dulcia is a muse of music and sultry words. She keeps the Eleri Shasa, the "Melodium Erotica", a libram of songs and words to inspire love and lust in mortals.

Elomia (Princess of Enterprise)

Elomia is the patron of commerce, stimulated by the "game" of business, and is often invoked to witness and seal contracts. She is the patron of many usurers and traders.

Galopea (Princess of the Feast)

Galopea is sometimes called the glutton of heaven, but this is unfair. She is the muse of pleasant repast, of the joys of gourmet dining, pleasant food and wine.

Sardura (Princess of Golden Wrath)

Sometimes called the "Left Hand of Bargains", Sardura is the messenger dispatched by Halea when terms are not lived up to. Sardura punishes with her "subtle stings" those who betray the goddess. Vengeance fits the original bargain; those who fail the contract find themselves worse off than before it was struck.

Selina (Princess of Abundance)

The lust for wealth is embodied in Selina. It is she who vigilantly guards Halea's unsurpassed treasure hoards. Selina also tempts mortal men with material things. Like her mistress, she is willing to bargain her favors, but her demands are less extreme.

Tania (Princess of Brief Ecstasy)

Tania is the one of the seven who moves among the mortals most often. As the demigoddess of sex and passion, she often takes the form of a beautiful young courtesan. She indulges in sex with either gender, and often leaves her partners worn to the point of exhaustion. She can, however, be quite jealous, and deals wrathfully with those who 'steal' her mortal lovers.

Thalia (Princess of Fortune)

A whimsical and capricious entity who delights in the vagaries of chance, over which she has some control. She is often called upon by gamblers (even those who are not followers of Halea). Hence the saying "Catch, recast" often used by dice players, exhortating Thalia to influence the outcome of the throw.

THE SYVERHYN

Once, the legend runs, there was a race of immortal and beautiful women, called the Syverhyn, who were chosen by Halea as her special people. To them was given the privilege of closeness to the goddess. They built and administered shrines and prospered. As time passed, however, men came to worship the women instead of the goddess. The Syverhyn took to wearing prudish robes and practiced aloof virginity to foster the illusion of their divinity. Halea was jealous, and undertook an elaborate revenge.

Halea smote the shrines of the Syverhyn and cast the females into the wilderness, pronouncing an elaborate curse that doomed them to be sexually attracted only to males of other species. When they consummated their desire they suffered a painful pregnancy, and gave birth to ugly, squat, horned, hairy, and rapaciously lustful males, which are sometimes called satyrs.

It is said that the Syverhyn continually petition Halea for alleviation of their plight. Occasionally she shows mercy, and grants surcease to one or more of them, allowing them to dwell with her. Most remain unforgiven, however, and they feature in many folktales, as do their bestial offspring. It is commonly believed that both can be encountered in the wilderness, and no few deformed or illegitimate human babies are blamed on the lustful satyrs.

Some tales have it that the Syverhyn often behave in the manner of dryads, luring mortal men with their unearthly wiles, and losing them in a nine month delirium of coupling during which she quickens with child. This dream becomes a nightmare during the nymph's labour as she gives birth to an ugly, brutish, satyr. This is enough to shock the mortal male back to reality. Few speak of their experience and the memories soon fade, although there may be residual unease about beautiful women, forests and children.

CORSILEA (HEAVEN)

Halea resides in the elaborately decorated and bejeweled palace of Corsilea. Within its crystalline walls are seven levels. The first five are occupied by devout worshippers of Halea, who have been admitted to Corsilea after death. Their mortal bodies, restored and perfected, spend eternity in the "orgy without end", an endless festival of erotic, gastronomic and artistic pleasures. The sixth level contains the treasure vault of the gods. The fabled Crimson Chamber occupies the topmost floor. It is here that Halea, her handmaidens, and her innumerable companions (of both genders) chosen from the lower levels, pursue unending pleasure. Those who share Halea's bed are driven (at least temporarily) insane by her passion. She returns such unfortunates, as well as the lovers she tires of, to the lower floors of Corsilea to recover.

Corsilea has been described in various ways:

"...a many-chambered keep, of crystal walls and silkened halls, a'froth of crimson colour, where soft and luxurious pools effervesce with lusty perfumes and hidden secrets among the splashing of wine; golden passion awaits the soul who rises to the Lady's eyes..."

EARLY CHURCH

Religious and quasi-religious cults based on hedonism predate recorded human history. Modern theologians claim that most of them, knowingly or unknowingly, involved Halea or her handmaidens as their objects of worship. A less commonly held (and widely belittled) opinion is that the hedonistic cults were related to the earth and fertility cults of the early Peonian church. While it is true that there were similar elements, there were far more divergences, and the latter theory seems very unlikely.

The early hedonistic cults were loosely organized and had little contact with one another; many had minimal religious overtones. The early worshippers generally believed in the principal of living for the pleasures of the moment; many aspects of modern Halean worship, notably the concept of the deity as the Maker of Bargains, were absent from their rites. Few of the cults made any attempt to proselytize their beliefs; those that did had little success.

Merodyne The Pale

The founding of the modern church is credited to Merodyne the Pale, the concubine slave of a wealthy merchant who lived in Karejia during the third century TR. Besides being a widely renowned beauty and an accomplished courtesan, Merodyne was a highly intelligent woman. Within a year of being purchased by the merchant (whose name is forgotten), she was in virtual control of his estates and had gained a sizable personal fortune by secretly investing both the gifts that her besotted owner gave her and by scrupulous creativity in her accounting.

After three years she had tripled the merchant's wealth, and at this point she offered to buy her freedom from him. She told the merchant that if he agreed, she would be willing to marry him, and would make him the wealthiest man "in the world". Her owner scoffed, rejecting the idea and belittling her talents. Within a month his business was in ruins and he was arrested for tax evasion, fraud, and smuggling. He committed suicide while awaiting trial. Merodyne, who produced evidence that she had purchased herself, and was therefore free, quickly became extremely wealthy and powerful.

Merodyne used her resources to turn her house (in the city of Livelis) into a palace of sensual and artistic pleasures. She became the leader of a large group of hedonistic cultists, and her residence was widely renowned as the site of elaborate and extravagant orgies performed, Merodyne said, to "sing the glories of the Golden Temptress". Many of these "feasts" lasted for several days and cost small fortunes. No matter how much was lavished on these entertainments, however, Merodyne's wealth seemed bottomless. She claimed that her life was the result of the blessings of Halea.

> "Look upon me, O ye who doubt the wondrous power of the Bargainer. I am witness to but the tiniest fraction of her powers....blessed am I for my faith and devotion. My ecstasies are the merest taste of what is in Her gift. Give unto her thine heart and the stolen moment shall remain with thee forever."

Merodyne's house came to be called the "Temple of the Queen of Pleasures". This reflected the steadily increasing theological element in her orgies, as well as being an unsubtle comment on the more tangible amusements provided. Merodyne's methods of spreading the gospel of Halea proved astonishingly successful. The combination of several minor miracles, the example of seemingly limitless wealth and pleasure enjoyed by Merodyne and her closest followers, and the general lack of harsh or restrictive moral or social imperatives attracted numerous adherants, particularly among the emergent merchant class.

The reputation of Merodyne's "Temple" and the benefits enjoyed by its "congregation" spread throughout south western Lythia, and became the site of pilgrimages by wealthy libertines, eager to affirm their faith in Halea and pay generously for religious instruction. Merodyne's disciples also travelled widely, preaching the doctrine of bargaining with the Empress of Opulence for wealth and pleasure.

It is said that Merodyne died at a late age during a seventy seven day orgy, supposedly while performing the Tenth Forgotten Act. Haleans revere her memory and consider her the founder of the church and its first pontiff, although that office was not created during her lifetime. Her house is still an active house of worship in Livelis. Called the Temple of the Pale, Haleans regard it as one of the most holy places in western Lythia, and it is a common destination for Halean pilgrims.

After Merodyne's death, her primary disciple Aurelia proclaimed herself pontiff and began the building of an elaborate temple complex, funded by lavish donations from worshippers. During the period of her pontificate many of the early hedonistic cults were absorbed into the church. Aurelia created much of the organizational framework of the Halean church, and established most of the basic rituals.

The act with which Aurelia is most commonly associated is the proclamation of the Temenesa Decree in 384 TR, by which it was ordained that only women could enter the clergy. Although this was largely a formalization of the existing situation, the action was taken to counter the activities of one Keser of Beria, a charismatic male prophet who described Aurelia and other priestesses as the "false harlots who defile the throne of opulence". Seeing that Keser was enjoying some success, and might pose a threat to her dominance, Aurelia issued the decree after receiving a fortuitous "holy vision". Halea, she said, would only admit "those whose poor forms glorify her perfection by imitation" to the divine mysteries. Aurelia used Keser's words as evidence of blasphemy and heresy, but before he could be formally accused he died of a terrible wasting disease that was widely viewed as evidence of divine wrath.

ORGANIZATION

The basic organizational unit of the Halean church is the temple. Responsibilities of priestesses within each temple tend to vary slightly according to the wealth, status, and political position of the church in a given region, but the following model is the most usual.

TEMPLE HIERARCHY

Common Halean dogma suggests that the seven temple offices are symbolic of Halea's seven handmaidens. It is said that the senior priestesses "make the small service in sacred emulation of those who make the greater".

Aramia (Queen Mistress of the Temple)

The High Priestess is chief administrator of the temple and makes general policy. The Aramia is also responsible for liason with temporal authorities and the temples of other churches. She also has various ritual functions, but shares these with the Lorishina and Yishvina (see below).

Ralithina (Mistress of Silk and Gold)

The Ralithina is responsible for administration of the temple treasury. The Ralithina is concerned with all sources of temple income, particularly donations and tithing from adherants. In regions where the practice is allowed by the local authorities, the Ralithina also oversees the "rental" or sale of pleasure slaves of both sexes. In some temples this priestess is responsible for the operation of gambling parlours, brothels, inns, or other businesses owned or financed by the temple. As a result, most Ralithina have considerable contact with the merchant class, and also wield immense power in the temple. Ralithina wear a necklace of seven coins as their badge of office.

Desilea (Mistress of the Luxuriant Page)

The Desilea is the temple archivist, maintaining such non-financial records and books as are in the temple's possession. Since the Halean church is not known for a high level of scholasticism, most temple libraries are fairly small. The Desilea is also responsible for keeping any special (non-sacred) artifacts that the temple owns.

Kilina (Mistress of Discipline)

The Kilina is responsible for temple security. She administers the Solithar (temple guards) and also functions as the temple's chief inquisitor. In many temples the Kilina employs numerous spies, both among the priestesses and in the secular population. The purpose of such agents is usually two-fold; first to keep a check on heresy, and secondly to gather information of advantage to the church.

Lorisina (Mistress of the Golden Banquet)

This priestess leads most high temple rituals. Her most important duty is organizing and presiding at the annual Banquet of Delight Festival, the most sacred celebration of the Halean year. The Lorisina often maintains her own archives and has in her keeping the most sacred artifacts the temple possesses. She shares some of her duties with the High Priestess.

Yishvina (Mistress of the Harmonies)

The Yishvina leads most lay rituals of the temple. Besides the obvious knowledge of ritual required to fill this office, it is usual for this priestess to possess a pleasant singing voice and some musical skill. Many lay rituals include musical selections purported to be from the Melodium Erotica. Since most rituals are partly or wholly improvised, quick wits and a good imagination are beneficial in this office.

Corthina (Mistress of Acolytes)

The priestess responsible for the training and direction of acolytes. It is the Corthina who decides when acolytes have proved themselves worthy of elevation to the ranks of the Shenasene. She is, more than any other priestess, responsible for the day to day running of the temple.

Shenasene (Priestesses)

The number of priestesses in each temple varies according to the wealth and popularity of the church in that region. Shenasene are generally assigned to one or another of the Mistresses, according to their talents. Most such assignments are semi-permanent, and appointments are made by the High Priestess, generally after seeking the advice of the appropriate mistress.

Shenasene are sometimes appointed to minister to the spiritual needs of individuals or families who are able to afford the service. Such priestesses reside in the family household, lead the devotions and give counsel on religious matters. Persons requesting a "chaplain" must sign a contract agreeing to support the priestess for at least a year. This is renewable (and renegotiable) at the end of the year or at the demand of the temple. In addition to the money paid to support the priestess, a substantial monthly donation must be made to the temple.

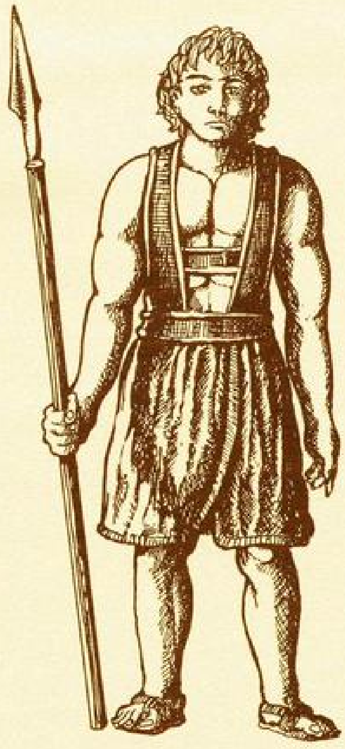
Corathar (Acolytes)

Acolytes are usually recruited between the ages of twelve and twenty. Most are the daughters of adherants, whose families see little hope of a favourable marriage for them, or seek to be rid of the burden of their maintenance. Some acolytes are drawn from women seeking refuge from familial wrath, while others find that the church provides a somewhat socially acceptable outlet for licentiousness. A few enter the church because it is one of the relatively few ways in western Lythia for a woman to gain power and privilege. The Mistress of Acolytes judges each prospective acolyte for their fitness. The prime requisite is attractive physical appearance, although this requirement has been known to become somewhat flexible after a large donation to the temple coffers.

After being accepted into the church, most Corathar spend at least two years learning basic doctrine and being trained in various skills. This period can vary greatly. The speed of their advancement depends in part on how quickly they learn, in large part on how well they please their superiors, and, like much else in the Halean church, can be influenced by well placed donations. Some wealthy mercantyle families deem it valuable to have blood ties to a priestess, and it is not uncommon for clans to spend huge sums to "further the spiritual education" of such a woman.

Solithar (Temple Guards)

Solithar are lay adherants, generally male, who provide security services for the temple and the clergy. Most temples maintain a small group of Solithar who are quartered on the temple grounds. The temple guards are under the jurisdiction of the Mistress of Discipline. Solithar often seem to be chosen for their physical form rather than their martial skill; most are handsome young men. It is not uncommon for Solithar to be recruited as consorts for the temple mistresses.



THE CENTRAL AUTHORITY

The Halean pontificate is located at Helas, a large temple complex on one of the western isles of Karejia. Founded by Aurelia, the first pontiff, in 372 TR, Helas grew quickly from a single, relatively isolated temple, into a large town. It includes numerous buildings in which the various enterprises and vast wealth of the church are administered or stored. The temple itself is one of the most lavish and heavily ornamented buildings in western Lythia.

Hilenea (Pontiff)

The Halean pontiff, sometimes called the "Eighth Handmaiden" is a mighty secular power in addition to being the spiritual leader of her church. As the supreme mortal priestess, she is expected to be an example of "the perfect petitioner", the worshipper who bargains truly and in good faith. Her personal wealth and power, like that of the church itself, is often used to illustrate the beneficent generosity with which Halea rewards her loyal adherants. The pontiff is elected for life by the Tevol-Hilen, who usually choose from among their own members.

Tevol-Hilen (Council of Fragrant Gold)

The pontiff's advisory council is made up of forty nine priestesses whose duty is to assist in the administration of the central bureaucracy. They are appointed by the pontiff who usually draws them from the higher ranks of the clergy, although any priestess can be appointed to the council. Although most pontiffs make some effort to provide geographical representation on the Tevol-Hilen, it is not required. Technically, all members of the Tevol-Hilen, except the grandmistress of the order of the Silken Voice, hold office until the death of their appointer, when they are replaced by the incoming pontiff. However, since their last official act is to elect the new Hilenea, the tendency is for the members who voted appropriately to be re-appointed.

THE REGIONAL AUTHORITY

Like many other churches, that of Halea divides western Lythia into various ecclesiastical provinces. Generally, these correspond to the boundaries of secular nations, although in the case of areas like Ivinia and Harn, several countries are grouped into a single primacy.

Salara (Primate)

A Salara is responsible for the administration of the church within a single ecclesiastical province. Primates are appointed for life by the pontiff, although they can be dismissed by the joint decree of the pontiff and the Council of Fragrant Gold. Salara often have deputies (Ensala) to assist them in their duties. In some regions these are effectively governors of their own subprimacies. Ensala are appointed by the pontiff upon the advice of the Salara. Primates usually select the high priestesses of the temples in their jurisdiction, although a few temples have the privilege of choosing their own.

Order Of The Silken Voice

The only clerical order of the church of Halea was created in 404 TR by decree of Hasiela II, the third pontiff. It was specifically founded to spread the doctrine of Halea throughout western Lythia. It remains essentially a missionary order, maintaining temples in the more remote areas of the continent. In most regions where the order is active, it is the highest effective level of church organization, and its regional grandmistress is almost invariably the primate. The headquarters of the order are in Helas, and the order's grandmistress is the only permanent member of the Council of Fragrant Gold.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Halean church rituals vary greatly from temple to temple and even from ceremony to ceremony. This is due to the fact that the officiating priestess improvises much of the ceremony as she proceeds. The exact words spoken during a ritual are not deemed important; as long as they include elaborate praises of Halea they are considered appropriate. Because most ceremonies involve little advance preparation, vague and ambiguous wording is very common.

However, in spite of this improvisation, certain basic elements are present in all rituals. They tend to be quite elaborate, including numerous esoteric frills and regalia. Active participation by the congregation, in the form of canted response, sacrifice of money, giving "witness" to the power of the Maker of Bargains, or more physical religious activity, is encouraged. Music and dance are usually featured, as is the "passage of ambrosia", the ceremonial tasting of sacred wine from a goblet carried from celebrant to celebrant by a priestess.

Certain drugs are commonly ingested by both priestesses and lay worshippers during ceremonies. The aphodisiac herbs Elprequir and Perigwar are probably most often used, although various hallucinogens and stimulants are often taken to achieve the euphoria that many adherants deem appropriate to the worship of the Empress of Opulence.

Chambers are available in most temples for those adherants who wish to worship privately. A special donation to the temple, called "the Bargainer's tithe" is required for this service. Adherants may worship alone or be assisted by a priestess, depending on the size of their donation.

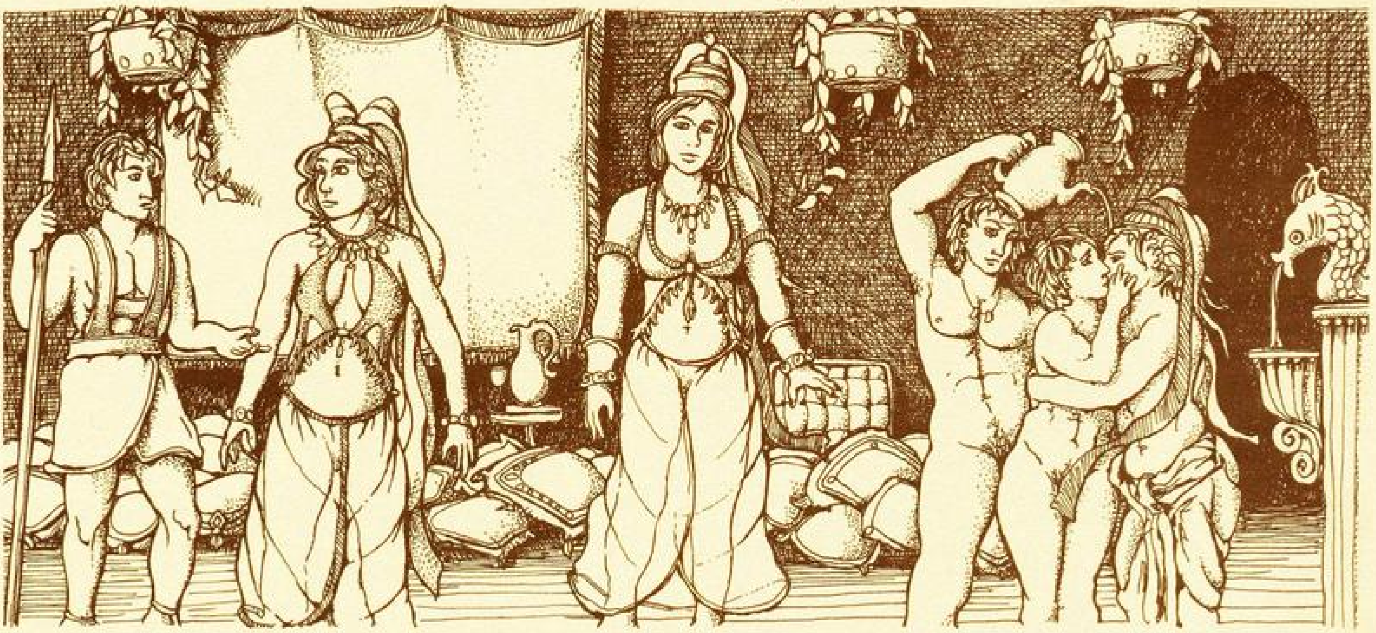
Shesneal Rituals

The monthly lay mass is held on the seventh day of each month, called Shesneala Day by Haleans. Lesser ceremonies are held at the discretion of the high priestess, although there is usually one ceremony in every ten day period. Excepting only the annual Banquet of Delight Festival, the monthly lay mass is the most important ceremony for lay adherants of the Maker of Bargains, and it is considered very unwise not to attend. Adherants who, for any reason, are unable to participate, usually make a sizable donation to the temple at the first opportunity, and perform an act of contrition to ask Halea's forgiveness.

The events of Shesneala Day are generally similar to those described above. The monthly mass tends to be more elaborate and will feature one or more special rituals. The most common of these is the "Great Tithing" in which adherants lay a donation of silver on the altar before prostrating themselves before the high priestess and asking to receive her blessing. This blessing is usually an attempt by the petitioner to ensure sexual or financial success, although it may simply be a general request for Halea to bestow the "touch of her golden hand".

Almost equally common is the consumption of certain "blessed foods" by the congregation. These are various exotic gastronomic delights served to the worshippers by temple acolytes. This ritual meal symbolizes the adherant's absolute fealty to Halea and belief in the pleasures that she provides. Many worshippers believe that they are momentarily transported to Corsilea after eating the sacred food. Since the dishes are usually spiced with a mild hallucinogenic drug, this is hardly surprising.

Another rite involves the sacrifice of the chastity of a male or female virgin. The object of the sacrifice is either a young adherant of the church, in which case the ceremony serves as an initiation ritual, or a unwilling victim kidnapped for the purpose. In the latter case it is not unknown for such ceremonies to conclude with the murder of the victim, although this is extremely rare. The Shesneala often concludes with an orgy.



SYMBOLS AND REGALIA

The priestesses of Halea dress in diaphanous robes of all colours, although purple, crimson or gold tend to dominate. Priestesses holding temple office have a patterned gold trim added to their sashes, marked with the symbol of their station.

The number seven is particularly significant to Haleans, and is believed to be symbolic of good fortune. Bells, stylized genitalia, and coins are also potent symbols of the worship of Halea. The standard architectural motif in Halean temples is the circle; most temples are at least partly circular in design and the hall of ritual is almost invariably circular or oval.

CALENDAR

The most important festival of the Halean year is the Banquet of Delight Festival occurring between the first and the seventh days of Halane. This seven day series of religious rituals and sensualist pleasures is believed to symbolize the eternal delights that a pious adherant can expect to enjoy in Corsilea. In regions where the church is powerful, worshipper often take part in public processions or outdoor festivals during this period. Eleri Plays, stylized public dramatizations of aspects of Halean theology, are performed by priestesses, usually to large and attentive audiences of Haleans and non-worshippers alike. The Banquet of Delight festival culminates on the seventh of Halane with a special Shesneala ritual.

GEOGRAPHY

Worship of Halea is widespread throughout western Lythia. Almost every sizable town contains a Halean temple, and with a few very localized exceptions, the church is legal everywhere. The largest concentration of temples is in Azeryan and Karejia.

In many regions the church wields considerable power. This is due to several factors. Many wealthy and powerful merchant families worship the goddess, and gift her temples with substantial financial support. Secondly, Halean clerics often take great pains to ingratiate themselves with the secular authorities, often using bribes and the granting of sexual favours to win legal concessions, and in more than a few cases, converts to Haleanism.

THE HARNIC CHURCH

The church of Halea has been present on Harn since about 410 TR. The establishment of the Harnic church was one of the primary incentives to create the missionary order of the Silken Voice. The order, which still maintains all temples on the island, regards Harn as its primary power base.

Although Halean temples are found in every human city on Harn (the only church that can make that claim) the church is most popular in the Thardic Republic, where it boasts numerous adherants among the political and mercantyle elite. In Melderyn, Kaldor and Kanday the church is tolerated if not encouraged by the secular authorities. In Rethem the church is officially discouraged (although not illegal) and the Golotha temple is constantly beleaguered by the "dark churches" of Agrik and Morgath. The primate for Harn is the high priestess of the Shiran temple, and the grandmistress of the Harnic branch of the order of the Silken Voice.

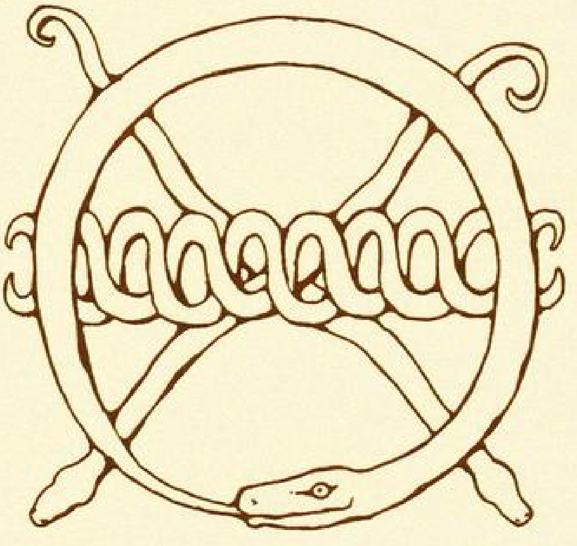
THE IVINIAN CHURCH

The worship of Halea was brought to Ivinia in 647 TR by the order of the Silken Voice. The order's main temple and the seat of the Ivinian primate is located in Fuhreling. Other temples are in Beleka, Jarehm and Pelby. The church has been able to attract few Ivinian adherants and is dependant upon financial aid from the central authority to survive.

Master of Araka-Kalai, Brooder in the Blasted Plains, The Serpent that Dwells Below, Accursed Lord of the Barren Cycle, Prince of the Fatherless Multitude, Craven Lord of Sterile Lands."

Ilvir is often considered a relatively minor deity, some deny his godhead and call him a demigod or demon. The fact that he resides so close to his mortal adherents compensates for his lack of strength, but he is still one of the least commonly worshipped deities of Lythia. The Brooder's powers are, however, beyond mortal comprehension.

Ilvir is a shapechanger, taking whatever form suits him at the moment. Hence, his adherents tend to represent him by symbols. His favourite shape is said to be that of the Serpent, a great gelatinous worm able to exude appendages or create organs at will. Serpentine forms figure prominently in Ilviran religious art.

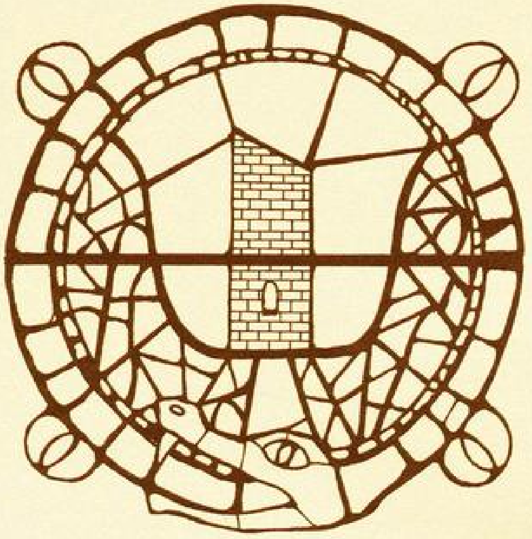


Ilvir is a relatively peacable and introspective god. He rarely interferes with the activities of other deities, or their adherents, and seems satisfied with the experiments on lifeforms for which is is best known. Ilvir does not demand any particular morality from his adherents; his ethical code seems to be centred on self-preservation. His worshippers range from good to evil.

The religion of Ilvir is shrouded in so much mysticism that many claim that even its clerics have no idea of what is going on. When the deity or his followers exert themselves in human society, they do so in as subtle and indirect a manner as possible.

ARAKA-KALAI

Ilviran theology is dominated by the fact that Ilvir is the only deity believed to dwell physically on Kethira. He seldom ventures from his home at Araka-Kalai, although it is also believed that at least the deeper reaches of Araka-Kalai exist simultaneously in a desert (the Blasted Plains) on Yashain, where the Brooder is constantly besieged by various demi-divine armies. The Kethiran manifestation of Araka-Kalai is located in the Harnic region of Misyn. Also called the "Pit of Ilvir" or "Ilvir's Shaft", the visible aspects are only a small part of the whole. Beneath a crumbling man made tower, there are endless dank caverns, in which the Brooder is said to spawn his creatures, the Ivashu, the "fatherless multitude". The odour is so bad that few care to approach; it is considered an act of great devotion to do so. See "Ochre Womb" below.



THE SERVANTS OF ILVIR

Besides the Deity there are few other figures in the Ilviran mythos. Whether these should be properly regarded as demigods, as unique varieties of Ivashu, or as entirely imaginary is unclear. Some, at least, lived mortal lives before finding their reward in "heaven". Such figures are usually given respect by Ilvirans, and may be worshipped. Seafarer Ibenis, Sudelrhynn the Bearer of Loam and Chuchlaen Wheelwright all have clerical orders named for them, although only the Order of Seafarer Ibenis regards its patron as central to its doctrine.

The function of the Servants is obscure. Ilvir seems to need little aid in his experiments, and exercises little control over his demi-divine underlings, most of whom seem to do as they please. Those who serve particularly well, usually as Ivashu, are elevated to the ranks of the great Servants, semi-independant demigods or demons. The auras of those who serve less well are given "eternal" life as one of the reincarnating Ivashu. Those who betray the god face oblivion or the whims of some other deity.

THE IVASHU

The "enchanted" creatures of Ilvir are known as the "fatherless multitude" or the "accursed beasts of the Barren cycle". Ilvir enjoys creating strange life forms, but has at his disposal a limited number of souls which he is constrained to employ repeatedly.

The Ivashu are completely sexless and infertile; when they die, their auras/souls return to Araka-Kalai, where they are reincarnated in new bodies. After spending some time in attendance at Ilvir's court, the reborn Ivashu are sent into the world. Most are quickly slain. Some are captured and shipped away for use in the Pamesani, but a few Ivashu get past these dangers and may be found in any part of Harn and western Lythia.

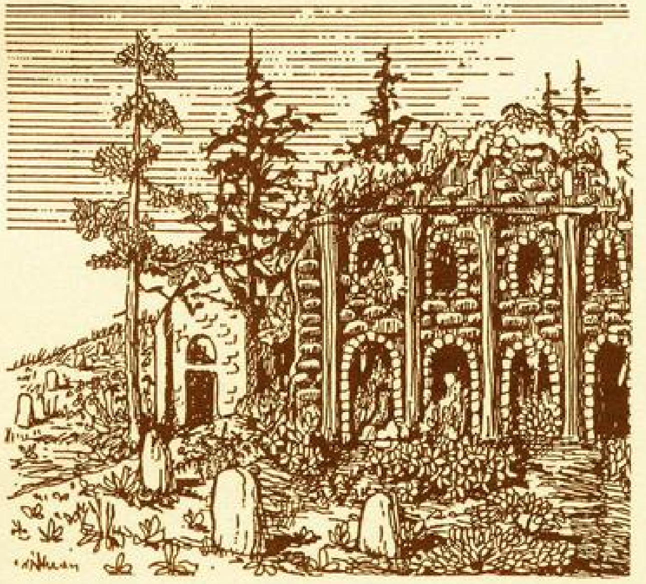
The Ivashu are compensated for their sterility by the possession of strange powers. Most species are intelligent and speak their own Ivashi language; others are semi-intelligent, speaking not at all, and operating mostly on instinct.

Almost any conceivable type of creature may be produced in small numbers by Ilvir, but five varieties are most common. These are: the Aklash, the "Vessel of the Choking Wind", a hulking, semi-intelligent, self regenerating monster, whose breath causes profound nausea; the gentle rock giant Hru, who dwell, for the most part peacefully in the highlands; the Nolah, the "Dank Stalker" or dangerous "Harnic Troll"; the mischievious Umbathri, who are called the "Bearers of the Mask" because of their alarming ugliness, and are able to blink in and out of existence; and the ever dangerous but fragile Vlasta, who move with blinding speed and are called, because of their anti-social culinary habits, the "Eaters of Eyes".

EARLY CHURCH

The worship of Ilvir is essentially a Harnic phenomonon. The date of Ilvir's arrival on Harn is unknown, although he has been in Araka-Kalai for at least several thousand years. Sindarin and Khuzan legends ignore the God, except for a possible reference in an old journal fragment found in Kiraz, "...venture never beyond the Rayeshas east, for there is noisome peril best let brood alone". The date of the journal is c.6800 BT, but whether the author is warning of THE Brooder or of some other peril is unknown. In any event, there are no recorded cases of Ilvir worship among the elder peoples.

When the Jarin came to Harn, c.1300 BT, there were among them several groups "summoned" from Lythia by Ilvir to be his flock. Their leader was called Ormanoam. He and his principal followers established themselves in the north and made converts among the Jarin. Their temple stood for more than a thousand years on the coastal island north of present day Arone. It spawned numerous independent sub-orders, sent mendicant clerics throughout Harn, and declined gradually in importance. It was finally destroyed by an Ivinian raid in 658 TR.



Contact with the elder peoples modified all aspects of Jarin culture, including their religious beliefs, but many Jarin seem to have retained a modicum of their Ilviran heritage, even while worshipping Siem. After the Battle of Sorrows (683 BT) and the Jarin diaspora, Ilviranism gathered strength, particularly in northern Harn.

DOCTRINE

To non-initiates Ilviran doctrine often seems an amorphous mix of inconsistent mysticism. While this view has some merit, it would be better to say that Ilviranism encourages the development of a personal view of Kelestia, and is an evolving complex of divergent views. The worship of Ilvir has always been individualistic. There has never been meaningful central authority, although worshippers of like mind have associated into orders, and clerics of different orders (or even within the same order) may ascribe to dramatically different versions of Ilviran theology. Most clerics are tolerant of each others' views, but there are fanatics who perceive their own visualizations as exclusively correct.

The basic tenets of worship are based on the conviction that Ilvir is, of all the gods, the most creative and inventive, one who ignores the vulgar squabbles of mortal men and immortal gods, and is concerned only with perfecting his art. (Cynical outsiders hold that he ignores the other gods out of impotence.)

Ilviric Dualism

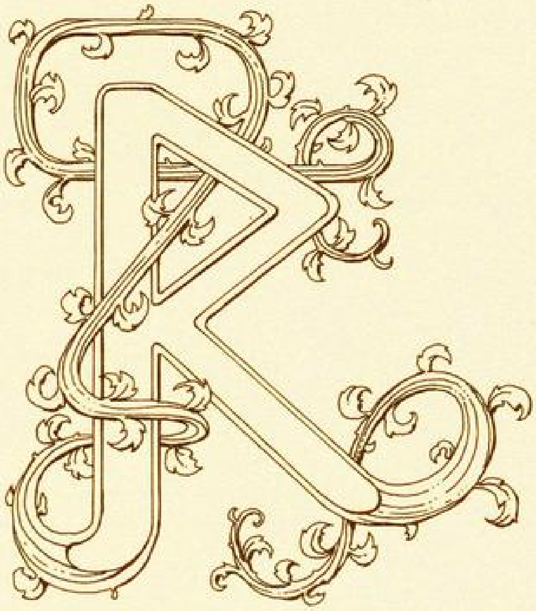
The predominant school of Ilviran theology postulates that each being has two souls, one that stays in the body after death and the other that leaves the body and goes to its afterlife, for Ilvirans, to Araka-Kalai. The first soul controls the mundane aspects of human life and the second is the creative intelligence, stimulated (or even created) by the deity. Extrapolation of this belief has resulted in the foundation of radical sects preaching that all creatures are the inventions of Ilvir, and that all beings return to Araka-Kalai after death.

Doctrine Of The Barren Cycle

Many Ilvirans believe that, as the creations of Ilvir, the Ivashu are a higher form of life than humankind, and represent forms pleasing to the deity and worthy of emulation. Mortal life is a prelude to a cycle of reincarnations as these blessed creatures, constantly learning more and acquiring higher enlightenment until the independence of demigodhead is achieved. Rumours surface from time to time, that this cleric or that is an Ivashu. The fact that so many clerics disguise themselves as Ivashu does not clarify the issue. It is undeniable that some Ilviran clerics are very peculiar.

Ilviran Scholasticism

There is a high degree of scholasticism among clerics of Ilvir, coupled with a tendency towards elaborate artistic design, particularly in manuscript illumination, tapestry weaving, and carving. Most temples have good libraries and many clerics take pride in their artistic skills. Clerics of Ilvir are seldom stern intellectuals; most are fond of poetry, song, and fanciful tale-spining, but this may be as much due to the religion's association with the Jarin.



ORGANIZATION

The line between laity and clergy in the church of the Brooder is vague. There is no central registration of priests and it is far from clear how one becomes one of Ilvir's chosen. In some orders a simple "call to the cloth", a claim to have received a vision of the deity, is deemed sufficient authority to preach the revealed word. Other orders set rigorous (and painful) standards that their member priests must meet.

Ilvirans do not recognize any central authority. This is in part due to the proximity of their deity; one who dwells on Kethira has less need to delegate authority to mortals.

TEMPLES AND ORDERS

For the most part, the concepts of the clerical order and the temple are synonomous in the Ilviran church. Typically, the Ilviran temple has few priests and acolytes in residence. It is not uncommon for there to be only six or eight clerics present at any one time. Not all clerics belong to an order/temple. It is thought that about half of them are independent mendicants persuing their own destinies in small bands or as solitary hermits or wanderers. The degree of their devotion also varies greatly. Some clerics hardly let their religion interfere with the conduct of their lives; for them it is something deep within, to be used when convenient, then put away.

Within the temples, the internal structure differs greatly. Only one officer, the grandmaster/high priest is found in every temple. Often the temple seems to function more as a secular economic commune than as a religious institution. This is partly due to the fact that the principal objective of many orders is to protect their members from outsiders. Some orders, particularly those on the Lythian mainland, consist entirely of mendicant priests.

In the settled temples, there are often a variety of officers as dictated by the dogma and needs of the order. If there are archives, there will be a librarian. If the order stresses esoteric ceremony, there will be a priest in charge of ritual. Acolytes may be governed by a particular master, and so on. Some temples keep stocks of "domestic" Ivashu, and these require a keeper.

Influence Of The Church

The political influence exercised by the church of Ilvir is generally minimal. Clerics of Ilvir are largely disinterested in politics, and few secular lords feel any need to consult this church. Only in and around Orbaal on Harn, where the adherants of Ilvir are relatively numerous, are the clerics regarded with much more than scorn by the nobility. Even in Orbaal, however, the church's slight influence has declined since the Ivinian conquest. The last strongholds of Ilviran "power" are the Jarin settlements of Leriel, Gwaeryn, and Pethwys. Since the clerics of Ilvir do not control their laity, the church has difficulty earning the respect of pragmatic nobles.

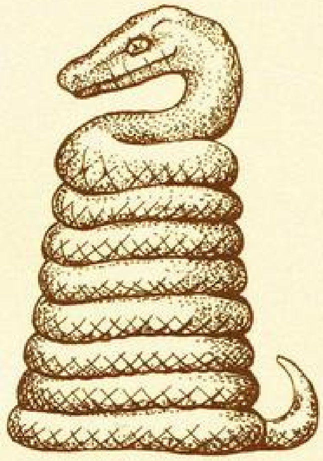
Ilviran doctrine does not generally lend itself to fanatical religious bigotry. Hence, most priests take little note of the doings of other religions. There are a few exceptions, however. The Order of Chuchlaen Wheelwright, for example, has a violent antipathy towards the church of Sarajin, but this is more a matter of ethnic and political hatred than religious issues.

Other religions tend to ignore Ilvirans. Since the church is seldom involved in temporal politics, is not a vehemently proselyzing religion, and does not generally inflict torments upon heretics or apostates, there are few areas of potential conflict. Some churches, such as those of Agrik and Morgath regard Ilvirans as natural prey, usually impotent victims for their dark rituals. Ilviran orders try to come to an understanding with those who surround them. Where arena spectacles are staged, such as Shiran and Golotha, local Ilvirans provide Ivashu for the Pamesani Games. Sarajinians and Laranians tend to regard Ilvirans as intellectuals hiding from the real world. The church of Save-K'nor think that the scholarly pursuits of the Ilviran orders are specious, muddy thinking nonsense, although individual Ilviran scholars have earned their respect. Haleans find their Ilviran counterparts overserious. The churches of Peoni and Siem are reasonably sympathetic, although the common ground between the three religions is their poor organization and disinterest in the temporal world, rather than firm points of doctrinal agreement.

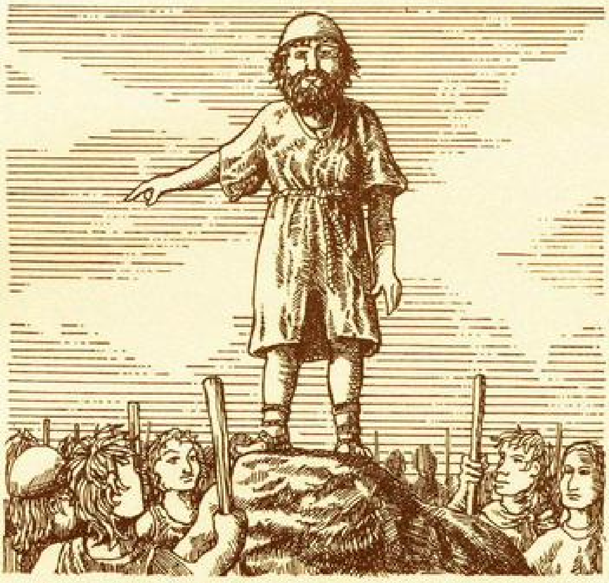
RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Forms of worship reflect the individualism of the practicioners. The orders celebrate masses in such vastly different ways that they may hardly seem part of the same church. Services occur at various times of day or night, on different days of the month, and restrict attendance in distinct often arbitrary ways. For example, the Order of the Yellow Hand allows anyone who wishes to attend their ceremonies, including adherants of other gods, providing they are of peaceful intent. On the other hand, the Order of Tuarbalt the Golden Limbed has no lay worshippers, and restricts attendance at its rituals to the highest level of its clergy.

Lay adherants often keep icons in their homes or about their persons. These are usually made and blessed by clerics, although this is not always deemed essential. The most common icons are representations of the "Sundered Claw", but small statues of Ivashu are also popular. In Ilviran homes these are normally placed in small alcoves. In regions where worship of Ilvir is unpopular or discouraged the icons are hidden.



A few features are common to most services. A sermon, often in the form of an allegoric tale or song is usually told. There is almost invariably a prayer, the content and imagery varying with the order's beliefs, led by the officiating priest. This is frequently followed by a lengthy period of silence, during which participants contemplate the wonders of Ilvir and their many distinct visions of reality. The creative bent of the Ilvirans leads them to improvise a great deal, even in their church services. Ceremonies have been known to include animal, human, Ivashu, or other forms of sacrifice, but this does not seem to be an official (or particularly frequent) element. In a few orders of the church Ivashu play a central and active role in worship. In most cases, however, this occurs in the rituals involving the higher clergy and does not happen in ceremonies for the laity.



Many of the allegorical sermons and lessons by Ilviran clerics use Ivashu as object lessons. One commonly told tale is that of Sehra-tu-Yalah, "The Nolah Who Fell in Love". According to the story, Sehra-tu-Yalah became enraptured by an Elmithri. Although immune to the water sprite's enchantment, the Nolah admired her grace and beauty without ever making his presence known. Finally, after many years of watching her, he spoke of his affection, offering some of his finest treasures. The Elmithri cruelly mocked both his desire and his ugliness, and Sehra-tu-Yalah was heartbroken. The story usually ends with the Nolah seeking death soon after this rejection. The tale in not regarded as true and is used purely for its emotional and educational content.

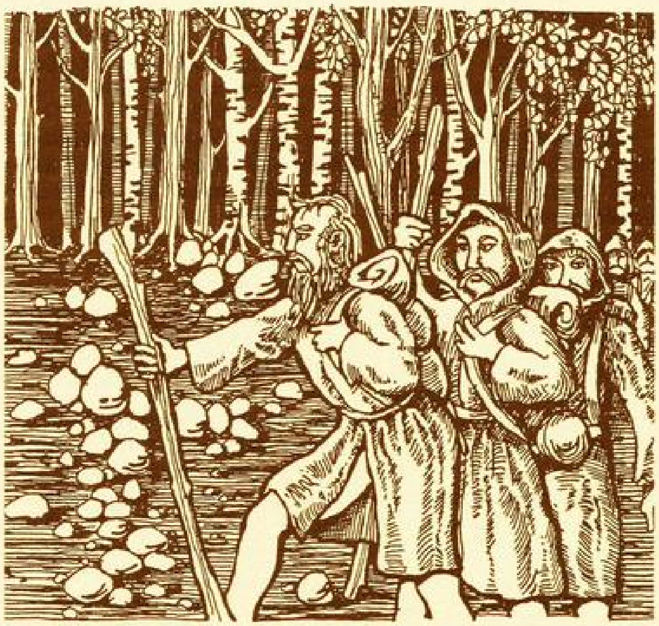
Ilvir makes few demands on his followers, but also seems to give little in return. Most clerical orders have few requirements of their clergy or their laity. No particular morality is required, and adherants are free to worship Ilvir in the manner of their choosing, making it both an easy and unpredictable religion.

The Araksin

The greatest religious festival of the Ilviran church takes place between Yaelah and Yaelmor in the month of Ilvin. The Araksin is one of few universal practices. Priests fast for the week preceding Araksin, usually withdrawing into solitude/silence to do so. During the two weeks of the festival various original dramatic works and extracts of the Ilviran mythos are performed by younger clerics.

The Pilgrimage

The most universal practice of Ilvirans are the pilgrimages undertaken to Araka-Kalai. However, even in this there is no consistency. Few lay adherents make the pilgrimage, some go often, and a few never return. Most Ilviran clergy make at least one trip.



The Araksin festival is the ideal time to arrive at Araka-Kalai. Ilvirans intending to make the journey gather in Shiran, Tashal or Leriel as much as two or three months prior to the festival. Some consider it to be impious to make the pilgrimage by any means other than walking, although wealthy adherents have been known to purchase a dispensation to ride from local or mendicant priests, and it is common for western pilgrims to make part of the journey by boat. Some fanatical pilgrims from western Harn reject the voyage across Lake Benath, preferring to demonstrate their piety by walking along its northern shore. Since this involves skirting the hazardous Rayesha Mountains in the uncertain weather of late fall, more than a few have died to prove their points.

Pilgrims try to travel in groups of twenty or thirty for companionship and safety, but it is often hard to find so many. In 716, a band of twenty pilgrims was ambushed near the Deret River by Agrikan "knights" of the order of the Cohorts of Gashang. The survivors were delivered to an easily surmised fate at the temple of Agrik in Shiran. This kind of atrocity results from the tendency of the dark churches to regard the pilgrims as sport, and has caused pilgrims to hire mercenaries or to bribe the evil temples to leave them alone.

Ivashi (The Temple Tongue)

Many clerics attempt to learn the language of the Ivashu. This is one of the reasons for keeping a menagerie of the beasts in a temple. Orders that conduct "high" rituals, do so in Ivashi. It is a fairly simple tongue, but capable of conveying a rich emotional content.

SYMBOLS AND REGALIA

Ilvir is most commonly symbolized by a sundered claw. The origin of this device is ambiguous. Some say that, following the ancient duel between Agrik and Larani, Ilvir recovered Agrik's severed claws and that it is from these that he made his creatures, but the belief that the Ivashu are made from portions of Ilvir's own gelatinous body is at least as common.

Variations on Ilvir's preferred form, that of the serpent, are nearly as common as the claw. The abilities to coil and change shape are stressed. Abstract whorls and loops figure a great deal in religious ornamentation. The most esoteric symbol is that of the "serpent devouring its children", a portrayal of a serpent eating its own tail. This is used where it is believed that the Ivashu are made from the "godly stuff" of Ilvir himself.

A fairly large number of orders mark special occasions by assuming the appearance of Ivashu. The most accomplished masters are said to be shapechangers, and use weird arts to play the roles of Ilvir's creatures. Others must rely on masks and makeup.

GEOGRAPHY

The worship of Ilvir is scattered widely throughout western Lythia, but is not common except in and around Orbaal on Harn, where many Jarin have long been adherants of the Craven Lord. There are relatively few temples. The largest are in Golotha, Tashal, Shiran and Leriel. There are numerous shrines maintained by mendicants, dotted about Harn and Lythia and a few temples isolated in the Lythian wilderness.

CLERICAL ORDERS

The clerical orders vary in size and in their degree of organization. If it is assumed that at least five members are needed to form an order, it is clear that only about half the Ilviran clerics belong to any order at all. Only a handful of orders have more than one temple, although there are good fraternal relations between some temples. There are far more orders than can be described here. The following are chosen for one of two reasons; either the size and importance of the order or its position representing a prominent school of thought.

Order Of Chuchlaen Wheelwright

One of the most fanatical and rigid orders, the Order of Chuchlaen Wheelwright was refounded at the end of the seventh century TR after several centuries of inactivity. The temple of the order is underground and centered around the Earthmaster site of Gedan in northern Harn. The temple is associated with elements of the Jarin resistance movement, and as such is one of the most political orders. The order takes its name from a semi-divine servant of Ilvir who is believed to labour forever, attempting to build the perfect wheel. (See "Gedan" [EH14].)

Conclave Of Meamyt The Hermit

This "order" was founded in 708 when Meamyt of Pyryn, an eccentric mendicant cleric, took up residence on Askellin Isle, a small forested island lying about a kilometre off the south coast of the Isle of Arathel in western Orbaal. Meamyt had gained an small local reputation for prophesy and the performing of various minor "miracles". Before secluding himself on Askellin, Meamyt proclaimed that he had been appointed by Ilvir to ready the way for "one arisen from the Plains and come unto the hearths of the humble". The fact that this statement is obscure (some say meaningless) has not prevented Meamyt from attracting a small number of disciples to his island. As of 720 there are six clerics in the conclave, living in small stone huts, braving the elements, and living lives of ascetic subsistence. Meamyt, who gives the appearance of being at least half mad, is still alive, and the few visitors to Askellin are treated to his confused and erratic ravings.

Order Of The Ochre Womb

The oldest surviving order on Harn, the Ochre Womb claims to have been founded over 1000 years ago. Temple records, however, are sketchy prior to 100 BT. Located about a quarter of a league southwest of Araka-Kalai, the priests of this order have always had the closest association with Ilvir's home, and have often regarded themselves as a "chosen elite". The order has functioned for centuries as the penultimate destination of Ilviran pilgrims. The majority of pilgrims never proceed beyond the temple of the Ochre Womb to the deity's residence, finding that their desire to visit Ilvir's Pit has waned. Farmland surrounds the temple, providing food to help support the clerics, who also sell holy souvenirs.

Early clerics of the order built Ilvir's Tower which stands within the pit. Originally intended as a shrine to the god, and still visited by clerics of the order, the tower has been slowly crumbling for several centuries. Most persons believe that the tower was built by Ilvir. The priests of the order do nothing to discourage this belief.

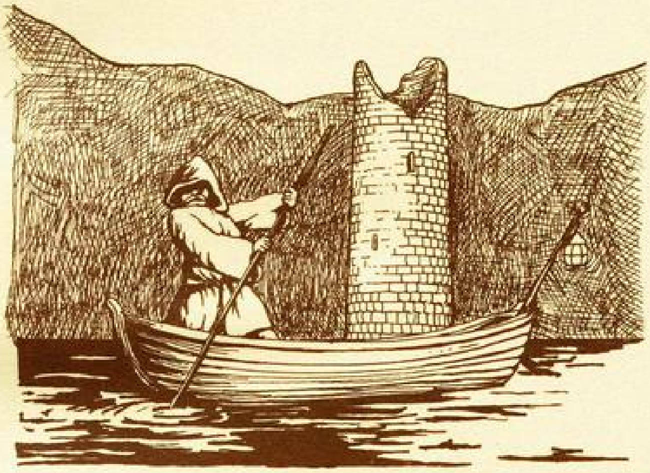
From the temple of the Ochre Womb to the Pit itself there runs a path called the "Serpent's Tongue". This thoroughfare periodically passes stone monoliths called the "Gates of Conception". Carved upon each of the Gates there is an inscription; one who recites an inscription to the Grandmaster will receive a certificate of his devotion. A person who reaches the third Gate is called a "pilgrim of the third stone" etc. Those who reach the sixth stone (and return to tell of it) are held in awe by most Ilvirans, for the sixth inscription is commonly believed to stand within the court of Ilvir.

Order Of The Pia-Gardith

The only temple of this poorly organized order is in Golotha. It is involved with the importation of Ivashu for the Pamesani Games and is, therefore, tolerated by the city's governing Heptarchial Council. Nonetheless, worship of Ilvir is discouraged in Golotha and his clerics periodically vanish.

Order Of Seafarer Ibenis

The temple of this sect is in Shiran. It is the main mustering place for pilgrimages to Araka-Kalai from western Harn. The Shiran temple is suffering from the 707 flood of the Thard; the temple yard is crumbling into the Thard River. The order provides Ivashu to the Agrikan Order of the Octagonal Pit for use in the Pamesani Games, although they are not the only source of the creatures. The arrangement has ensured reasonably good relations between the two churches. The order derives its name from the servant of Ilvir who clerics of the sect believe is the "ferryman of souls", returning the auras of dead Ivashu to Ilvir for rebirth. Some literal minded clerics believe that Ibenis sometimes manifests as a humanoid figure poling a boat across the fetid pool at the bottom of Ilvir's Pit.



Order Of Sudelrhynn The Bearer Of Loam

The high priest of the Leriel temple in Orbaal is the closest thing to a Primate of Harn, but only because he is highly respected by the majority of Ilvirans. The Order of Sudelrhynn is one of the few Ilviran clerical orders to maintain more than one temple. It has a small establishment at Gwaeryn. The order's name is derived from the Ivashu first created by Ilvir, who, it is believed, honoured his creator by remaining forever in Araka-Kalai and performing the most menial of tasks. This is the largest, wealthiest, and best organized of the various orders. About two thirds of its members are, nonetheless, mendicants. (See "Leriel" [EH15].)

Order Of Tuarbalt The Golden Limbed

This small and obscure order is a nomadic band. Its existence is known to few. The fanatical priests of Tuarbalt are cruel and prone to violence. The order was founded in 692 TR, by priests from Leriel, and is now comprised mostly of local tribesmen and a few converted mendicants. The order worships through human sacrifice, and they have not hesitated to find victims among the pilgrims to Araka-Kalai, as well as from local tribesmen. It is believed that the clerics have trapped a unique and terribly dangerous Ivashu, and that sacrifice victims are thrown to it. Rumours that have reached the outside world suggest brutality that rivals the rites of the churches of Morgath and Agrik.

Enclave Of The Verdant Pool

A small and poorly organized temple on the outskirts of Tawheim in Orbaal. The temple is used as a meeting place by a Jarin resistance group, but they are using the clerics as cover for their activities rather than for inspiration. The Enclave of the Verdant Pool draws most of its worshippers from the local Jarin peasantry. It is one of the poorest orders on Harn.

Order Of The Yellow Hand

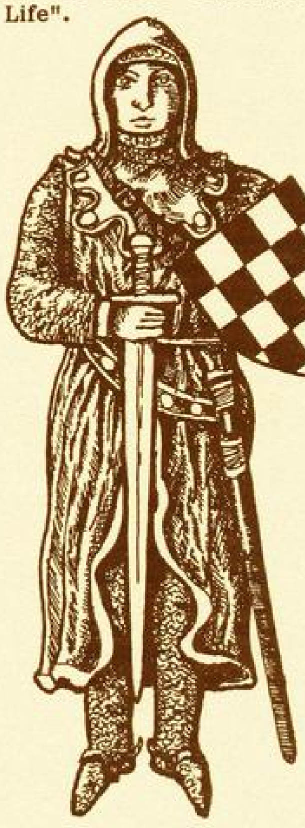
This also functions as a hostel for pilgrims to Araka-Kalai. The city of Tashal, or more properly the ruins of Kelapyn-Anuz seem to have some significance to the clerics of Ilvir. Lothrim apparently secured a tome sacred to the deity that he secreted in the old city. Local priests believe that the holy book is still hidden somewhere beneath the city. According to their beliefs, the book, called "The Scant Illumination of Vision" deals in some unknown way with Ilvir's citadel of Araka-Kalai. Clerics of the order periodically descend into the catacombs beneath the city in search of the tome. This has occasionally brought them into conflict with the clerics of Naveh and members of the Lia-Kavair, both of whom frequent the tunnels beneath Tashal.

Shieldmaiden of the Worthy Cause, Guardian of Dolithor, Protector of the Brave, Lady of Paladins, the Unwilling Warrior. "

Larani is the benevolent goddess of chivalry and battle, the reluctant warrior. Her followers claim she is the greatest of the trinity of war gods, but she is more constrained by honour and conscience than either Agrik or Sarajin. This is a weakness, since Larani will not strike without warning nor without cause. It is also a strength since Laranians do not forget whose side they are on.

Larani appears most often as a tall maiden clad in a white gown with red trim. About her waist and head are circlets of silver; she is fair of face, and strong, although she may not show her power. This is the aspect of the Lady of Paladins, one whom it is an honour to serve and protect, the guardian of knightly virtue, the warrior's lady, the ultimate object of chaste and courtly love. The Lady of Paladins is symbolic of more than feudal womanhood, she epitomizes the worthwhile aspects of feudalism, duty to one's superiors and inferiors, striving to attain the unattainable, worthy goal, the quest to excel.

When Larani looses her patience with her enemies or lapsed adherents, she assumes the aspect of the "Terrible Lady of the Flowing Red", and is ready to do battle, no longer is she the protected; she becomes the Protector and does battle on her own behalf. As the Lady of Red, she wears Angcaradina, her blood-red mail. She also bears Hyvrik, her red and white checkered shield, and Avarkiel, the Sword that Strikes True, which is also called "Oathbinder" and "Herald of the End of Life".



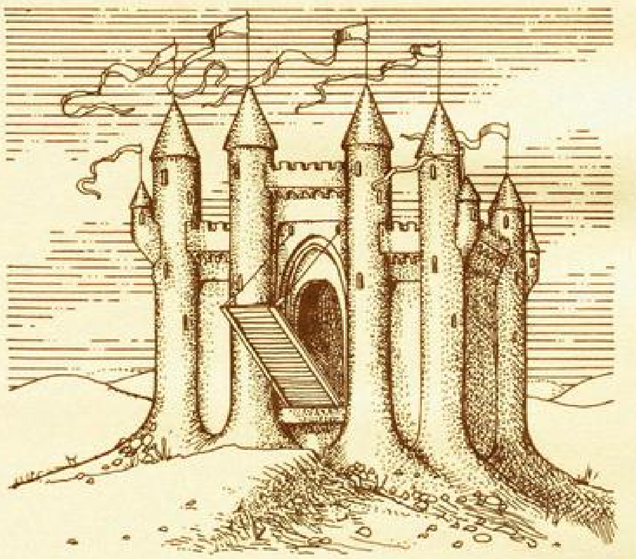
There is considerable emnity between Larani and Agrik, the evil god of war. Larani once wounded Agrik in battle, severing two claws from his left hand. Some theologians believe that Agrik will eventually attempt to murder Larani regardless of the consequences. This hostility is reflected in the mortal churches of both deities.

TIRITHOR

Larani dwells in Tirithor, which may be translated as the "Kingdom that Guards" or the "Land of the Mighty". Tirithor is probably located on Yashain and is constantly at war with the realms of Agrik and the other evil deities. Tirithor is organized as a feudal state; Larani is the Queen; her barons are demigods, her knights are slain heroes. The fertile countryside divided into manors and worked by yeomen and a virtuous peasantry. Tirithor is the feudal ideal.

DOLITHOR

The heart of Tirithor is the legendary castle of Dolithor, seat of the goddess and haven of her followers. It is said to be the fairest structure in two worlds, and the strongest fastness, although followers of Agrik claim the latter distinction for Balgashang. Dolithor stands atop a hill and from its parapets the goddess may view the whole kingdom and marshal her forces for its defence.



MENDIZ

Mendiz is the greatest of Larani's demi-divine servants, her chamberlain and constable of Dolithor. He has the form of a great, crimson, winged lion. He bears a lance with a checkered pennant, and a shield (also checkered). When the goddess leaves her kingdom to walk among her mortal adherents, it is Mendiz who governs in her stead. When a great battle is fought on the borders of Tirithor, Mendiz is her Bannerbearer. Occasionally, the Winged Lion is dispatched to the mortal plane, most often in mortal guise.

VALAMIN

Valamin is a little known member of Larani's household. He takes the form of a slim young man in snow white robes, on the hem of which is a small bloodstain. He is sometimes called "the Frowner" since his face is always thoughtful. He smiles, it is said, only when given some special favour by the goddess. Some hold that Valamin is actually a son of Peoni, sent to Tirithor to remind Larani of, "that which might be forgotten". Legend has it that Valamin once slew a demon in defence of the fields of Valon, hence the stain on his garment. His mother thought it best that he dwell elsewhere. Valamin is a sad figure, too aggressive for Valon and too passive for Dolithor. Were it not for Valamin, Larani might more often assume the aspect of the Terrible Lady; he calms her when she becomes wrathful, and councils her in moderation. Valamin often bears messages between the two goddesses, but visits the mortal plane only rarely.

THE KNIGHTS OF TIRITH

These are Larani's most often used servants. They are her royal guard, her special emmisaries. The group is an Order comprised of demigods and former mortals. Their number is small, perhaps a few dozen, but is gradually increasing. The Knight-Commander of the Order is called Orthas. He was once a mortal knight, but was favoured with elevation to demigodhead when he died defending a maiden against a demon of Agrik, although this was only the last act of a noble life. Orthas is called Larani's most faithful servant, he will obey any order given him without question.

THE CHIVALRIC CODE

Victory is secondary to Laranians. It is far more important to behave properly, to contest for the right reasons, and to do battle with honour. Those who follow Larani must be brave, compassionate and honourable. None are more honoured than those who fight without hope of victory for a cause that is just. Theirs are the honoured seats in the halls of Dolithor.

Societal order is an ideal for the chivalric knight. He is the guardian of his culture. He is motivated by duty to his vassals and servants as well as to his lawful superiors and his clan. Laranianism works best in feudal societies, for these are, at least in theory, founded on obligation and privilege.

The code recognizes the possibility of conflicts of right against right. Hence, it is possible for followers of Larani to find themselves on opposite sides in a war. Their duty is to strive for victory in accordance with their feudal (or societal) obligations, but they are ever bound to fight "fairly". In battle, quarter may be offered and accepted with honour. If one's opponent is evil, quarter should be offered to him, but not accepted from him. The object of the chivalric warrior is to defeat opponents in the furtherance of a just cause, not to maim or slay unnecessarily.

Laranians recognize that battle sharpens the skills of combatants, making them stronger and better able to serve the chivalric ideal. This is deemed a sufficient reason to engage in "friendly" competition. Laranian knights often challenge other knights for the right of passage or for no particular reason at all. To the victor goes the loser's armour, although more often token or monetary compensation is accepted (who needs two sets of armour?). In any event, it is the contest that counts, not the prize. Tournaments and tilts are not designed to be injurious or fatal, but accidents do happen; this is not a dishonourable way to die, although one who kills accidently will do penance and assume some responsibility for the widow and her children.

The tournament is an occasion for Laranian knights to champion some lady, organization or cause, and bring her/it honour by competing, especially by winning. Tournaments may consist of jousting between pairs of knights to determine the most proficient. The oldest tourneys are battles between (often large) teams/orders of knights. Few causes are settled in the tournament. These are, theoretically at least, "friendly" contests to earn honour by participating.

A more serious type of combat is the Trial by Combat. When there is an issue of honour between gentlefolk, the one or both contenders may opt to settle it in this manner. Disputants may select champions, or fight themselves, and the issue is legally settled on the field of honour. Such duels are more often fatal since there may be important causes at stake and the loser may be dishonoured or disinherited, but there are degrees of dishonour, and Laranians are (supposed to be) magnanimous in victory. In most cases, the mere fact of competition is enough to redeem both parties' honour.

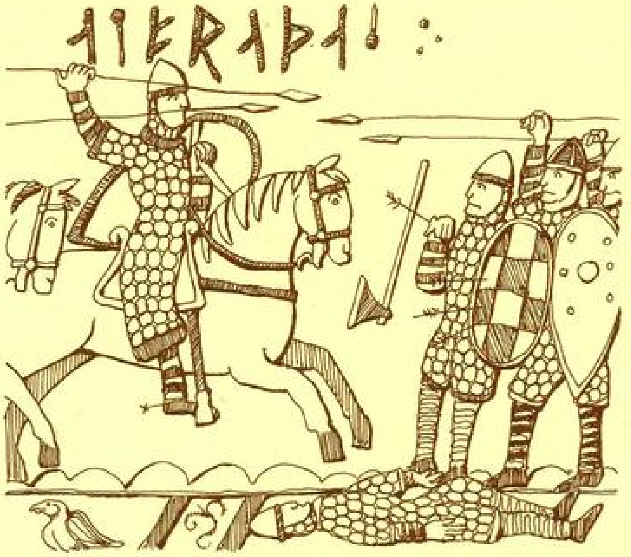
EARLY CHURCH

Saint Ambrathas Of Alamire

The date, origin and birthplace of Ambrathas are unknown, and considered irrelevant by the church of Larani. He was a warrior who, when travelling, came upon a maiden beset by a dozen brigands, who had just finished the rout of her escort. Ambrathas issued a challenge to the brigands and somehow managed to defeat them. The maiden thanked Ambrathas and gifted him with a token of her gratitude, a small red and white checkered kerchief, which he tied about his neck. As he escorted the lady to her destination, they were attacked seven more times, on each occasion by more fearsome foes. The final encounter was with eight demons. Each time, Ambrathas steadfastly repelled his opponents without thought of retreat and never complaining of his worsening wounds. As they came to a hill overlooking the maiden's destination, a castle of unnatural fairness, Ambrathas collapsed and could go no further. As he lay, he experienced a vision of the maiden transformed into the goddess Larani. She told him that the castle below was hers, Dolithor, but that it was not his destiny to enter it, although he must ever strive to do so. Ambrathas heard the goddess map out his future as her champion. Although he knew his inadequacy for the tasks she set him, he accepted the challenge.

Ambrathas lay long recovering from his wounds. When he awoke the castle and the goddess were gone. In their place were a brooding dark fortress and five mendicant mortal priests who said they were sent by Larani to aid him. Their first task would be to take the dark castle below from its evil warlord. To this end, one of the mendicants blew a horn which was answered by the appearance of a small band of warriors who called themselves the Knights of Tirith. Ambrathas led the knights to the gate of the castle and challenged the occupants. Ambrathas and his band won the day, despite the fact that they were outnumbered five to one. The Knights of Tirith departed as soon as the battle was over. The dark fortress was converted into a temple and a chapter house for worthy knights and called Alamire. The tiny priesthood trained acolytes who were sent abroad to spread the word, and Ambrathas entertained and converted warriors to the cause of the Lady of Paladins. For twenty years

Alamire stood. Then the Knights of Tirith returned and told Ambrathas to send everyone away. He did this. Soon after, a mighty army swept down upon Alamire, and although Ambrathas and the Knights fought bravely, the castle was destroyed and they were slain.



There was great sorrow among the followers of Larani, but the priests and knights took inspiration from the tale of Ambrathas of Alamire. They continued their work and attracted men of honour to their cause. The fundamental objectives of the early church were the establishment and preservation of the feudal order, the defeat of evil, and the glorification of the Lady of Paladins. These were to be achieved by the creation of a fellowship of men of good will.

From the first, there was a fairly clear distinction between clergy and laity. Priests achieved a "state of grace", closer to the deity, giving them greater insight. Thus, they were better able to interpret the world and the meaning of life. For almost everyone, the priesthood were essential mentors; only with their guidance could most laymen hope to achieve their own state of grace. The priesthood was to be exalted and somewhat isolated from worldy ills. It was the duty of the laity to champion the cause. The priesthood was the conscience of the church; seldom would they take up arms in their own defence, since there would, if the priests taught well, always be lay-knights to call upon at need.

The principle of divine grace led to acceptance of the idea of ecclesiastical infallability. Greater command of the holy mysteries, the circles of ritual, must inevitably lead to a higher state of grace and reduce the liklihood of the priest erring on matters of dogma. Those who demonstrated greater command of the mysteries were promoted above their fellows.

ORGANIZATION

The backbone of the Laranian church is the temple, particularly the rural temple, most of which are self sufficient and hold large tracts of land. The church of Larani is well organized and designed to provide the maximum communication between various levels of authority. Since 227 TR it has also proved efficient at adapting to take best advantage of feudal societies.

In many feudal kingdoms, the church holds substantial estates and is often the equal, both in wealth and power, of mighty secular lords. Additionally, the fact that the church has always maintained well organized military units in the form of fighting orders has often resulted in high ranking Laranian clerics controlling the largest single armed force in any given region.

TEMPLE HIERARCHY

The Serolan (High Priest)

The High Priest is the master of the temple and makes policy in consultation with the other masters. On the Council of Five, as the High Priests and the other masters is called, he has three votes, guaranteeing that his wil can only be defeated by a combination of all four masters. He is under no obligation to cast all of his votes at once, or even in the same way. Many Serolans use the number of votes cast to indicate the strength of their opinion. In cases where there is an even division of opinion between the four masters, a High Priest may split his votes to indicate partial approval of the position taken by those they vote against.

The Valaran (Master of Acolytes)

The master responsible for training of acolytes and assigning their duties and labours. The Valaran also decides when an acolyte has progressed sufficiently to be tested for elevation to the priesthood. More than anyone else, the Master of Acolytes is responsible for the day to day operation of the temple.

The Suloran (Master of Archives)

The Suloran is responsible for the temple library, holy relics, and other matters. He is also responsible for temple bookkeeping, a very important role considering the wealth of many Laranian temples. As a result, the Suloran is sometimes the head of a large bureaucracy.

The Obasaran (Master of Secular Affairs)

The master who is given the special duties of liason with secular lords, particularly those from whom the temple holds its lands. In temples that hold considerable lands the Obasaran often weilds immense effective power. Since they are usually responsible for collecting revenue from temple estates, the potential for corruption is high, and more than a few have yielded to temptation.

The Menoran (Master of the Fighting Order)

The Menoran is in charge of relations with the fighting order associated with the temple. He leads ceremonies for them and generally acts as their spiritual advisor. His duties often require that he be absent from the temple, visiting the chapter houses of the fighting order.

The Matakea (Temple Priests)

The number of Matakea varies from temple to temple, largely depending on the wealth and self-sufficiency of the particular location. Matakea are assigned (by the High Priest) to various masters on a semi-permanent basis and assist them in the performance of their duties.

Matakea are not expected to be celibate, nor are they required to lead the lives of irreproachable ascetics. They are, however, required to display compassion, courage and a high degree of honour. As the church has grown wealthier and more powerful, the early ideal of the semi-isolated priest has been modified by the needs of administration.

In a few unfortunate cases rascally priests have amassed vast personal fortunes, led lives of semi-discreet debauchery, or endorsed a more aggressive doctrine than is proper. The official reaction to such behaviour has usually been to turn a blind eye. It should be noted that this kind of clerical corruption is relatively rare. Most Laranian priests do their mortal best to live up to the ideals of their doctrine. Perhaps it is this standard of probity that makes the infrequent corruption of clerics all the more appalling.

Clerical corruption causes some moral dilemmas within the church. The early concept of ecclesiastical infallibility has largely remained in the modern church, and sometimes leads to circuitous rationalization on the part of backsliding clergy, seeking to justify or excuse their actions. It is commonly held that the occasional corruption of her mortal priests causes Larani grief, and sometimes anger. Clerics who have been punished by loss of office, excommunication, or other means, are deemed to have suffered the wrath of the goddess. Some believe that Larani will tolerate moderate venality "as long as the greater good is served"; a point of view that is favoured particularly by those who have fallen to temptation. A more doctrinaire viewpoint contends that Agrik is the cause of corruption. "The fiery temptor spews vile words at the ear of mortal folly".

Theological debate in the Laranian church is divided over the fate of the souls of "errant" clergy; some believe that the diety eventually forgives them, allowing them to dwell in Tirithor, others hold that such souls are "cast beyond redemption" by an angry goddess. These represent the two most commonly argued points of view; there are several others.

A relatively recent practice has been for Matakea to be assigned as the personal "chaplain" to noble families requesting (and able to afford) such a service. Such priests usually reside with the family, counselling them on spiritual matters and leading their devotions. Wealthier families may build a private chapel for their worship. Some nobles, seeking a form of status, attempt to have higher ranking clergy than simple priests assigned to them. While this is possible (a few earls can boast a bishop) it is rare, and when it is allowed the cleric is usually required to maintain "normal" duties.

The Ashesa (Acolytes)

Acolytes usually enter the church between the ages of sixteen and twenty four, although it is not uncommon for older men, usually retired soldiers, to "hear the call" at a far later age. Many acolytes are the younger children of noble families who, seeing little chance of an inheritance, enter the priesthood. Upon becoming acolytes, individuals take the "Hesa-eran", the Three Vows to uphold the moral dictums of the church. During their training period (usually about two years) acolytes are taught ritual and dogma, and assist priests and masters in their tasks. They also do much of the menial work in the temple.

When they are judged ready by the Master of Acolytes, they are questioned by the council of masters on doctrinal matters to test them. If they are judged ready, they are allowed to undertake the "Telur-Vakum", a ritual labour symbolizing their devotion to Larani. Each acolyte determines his own labour, submitting his proposal for the approval of the High Priest. Telur-Vakum can range from manuscript illustration to lengthy and dangerous quests. Once the labour is approved the acolyte begins, and upon completion (which need not be successful) is declared Matakea.

THE CENTRAL AUTHORITY

Saint Perelyne Of Tengela

It was not until 227 TR that one person was acknowledged as supreme mortal leader of the Laranian church. Perelyne was a priestly acolyte of the (female) abbey of Tengela located in (present day) Trierzon. She convinced her temple mistress to call a universal congress of church leaders; and spoke of the need for central authority. The suggestion was timely since certain of the evil churches were becoming more aggressive. Perelyne demonstrated a command of the mysteries greater than any other; this was particularly remarkable in view of her youth and inexperience. Perelyne claimed to have had a series of divine visions, speaking with such innocent conviction that she greatly impressed the assembled churchmen. She called upon them to elect a pontiff and returned to her studies, saying her task was done.

The congress is said to have deliberated for several hours in an attempt to select a leader. Eventually they agreed to leave it in the hands of Larani; they would elect the first priest to enter the chamber. Soon after, Perelyne came into the chamber. "I have brought," she said, "a gift of wine for the one you have chosen." Thus, despite her protests, Perelyne became the first pontiff of the Church of Larani.

The present structure of the church of Larani evolved in the five decades following the creation of the pontificate at Tengela in 227 TR. The first pontiff, Saint Perelyne, and her two immediate successors did much to organize the church to face the threat posed by the activities of various evil churches, particularly that of Agrik. Saint Janasyn, the second pontiff, issued the Guardian Decree, a writ that initiated the concept of the Laranian temple warrior. About three hundred years later, as feudal societies grew in power in western Lythia, this decree was amended to allow the creation of the church's fighting orders. Egenis, the third pontiff, created the Holy Office.

The Sebrath (The Pontiff)

The Abbot (Abbess) of Tengela, as the supreme mortal leader of the church is sometimes known, is a powerful secular lord in Trierzon as well as having considerable spiritual responsibilities. Since 717 the Sebrath has been Allyn of Kamalrith, a highly spiritual man of forty three, and a masterful and intelligent politician. While he administers the temporal properties of the church with great skill, he pays close heed to his spiritual duties. This is a welcome change from his predecessor, Lursyle of Perail, who did much to increase the wealth of the church at the expense of some compromises to the Laranian ideal. Under the poor example of her ten year rule, various excesses were allowed to grow.

Although Allyn has instituted a discreet program of reform, several problems remain unsolved, and in a few areas (most notably in parts of Azeryan) there is resistance from clerics who have grown wealthy, powerful, or dissolute. One of his concerns is the activities of the fighting order of the Lady of Paladins, who are conducting what amounts to a genocidal campaign against the Solori tribesmen of Harn. Although he has sent several missives to the Harnic Primate, Kerthede of Talvail, she lacks the confidence to put a stop to them.

The Tirnatha (The Body of the Unwilling)

This twenty member council serves as an advisory body to the pontiff and also make up the effective government of the church's estates. Members are appointed by the pontiff from the primates and archbishops. The name is derived from the tradition that, when the pontiff summons an individual to the office, they are required to formally refuse three times before taking office, symbolizing their desire to remain "simple" priests, uninvolved with the political intrigue of the pontifical court. There are usually at least two factions on the Tirnatha, and one of the pontiff's most difficult duties is preventing rancor from getting out of hand. The present pontiff has been aided by the deaths, of old age, of four members of the Body of the Unwilling since he took office. This has enabled him to appoint persons who are more in keeping with his program of reform.

When a pontiff dies the Tirnatha elects his successor. Election requires fifteen votes, a rule that occasionally results in long periods of negotiation before the necessary number of votes can be cast. They can choose any priest to fill the office, but most often choose either one of their own number, or a primate or archbishop.

The Ethelanca (The Holy Office)

The Ethelanca was created by the third pontiff in 268 TR, in an attempt to guard against internal corruption and impiety as the church grew wealthier. It is answerable only to the Sebrath although the Tirnatha has some influence. The activities of the Holy Office have varied considerably over the last several centuries, largely depending on the motives of the pontiff. The Sebrath Lursyle, who died in 717, used the Ethelanca as a tool to destroy or weaken her opponents, often by trumping up charges of heresy.

At present the Holy Office is in a state of disorganization due to the ongoing reforms instigated by Allyn, the present pontiff, who is attempting to purge some of his predecessor's appointees. It is speculated that Allyn intends to use the Ethelanca against some of the bishoprics of Azeryan, particularly those most resistant to his reforms. He is hoping to eliminate clerical corruption within the empire, which has traditionally contained some of the most venal clerics in the church.

The Holy Office has periodically undertaken inquisitions among the laity, most recently in eastern Trierzon between 616-620. Called the Tobran Inquisition, after the fanatical bishop who instigated it, the four year "rooting out of heresy" resulted in over one hundred executions for blasphemy, heresy, and witchcraft. This event did much to discredit the Ethelanca, to the extent where the Body of the Unwilling urged the pontiff to disband it. Although the Holy Office survived that crisis, since that time its activities have been far more restrained.

THE REGIONAL AUTHORITY

The Laranian church divides western Lythia into ecclesiastical provinces called primacies. The borders of many of these provinces coincide with the political boundaries of various nations. Some primacies (Harn and Ivinia for example) include several kingdoms. The wealth and power of these provinces depends on the legal status of the church, the number and value of estates held, the number and social rank of the adherants etc. Regions have considerable effective autonomy (particularly those at a distance from Tengela) but usually pay substantial heed to the advice and instructions of the pontiff.

Lirrath (The Primate)

The primate is the administrative head of his province, and is responsible for the activities of the Laranian church therein. Lirraths are appointed by the pontiff after consultation with the archbishops of the primacy.

Serekela (Archbishop)

Serekelas are appointed by the pontiff, and are responsible for a sub-region of a primacy. He will have authority over several temples and reports to the primate. Most archbishops appoint the high priests and other senior temple officers in their districts, although some delegate that authority to their bishops.

Rekela (Bishop)

Rekelas can be appointed either by the pontiff, or by an archbishop or primate. In the latter cases the appointment must be approved by the pontiff. Rekela are subordinate to archbishops and are in charge of a lesser division within the primacy. Bishops are primarily administrative officers of the church, although many become important secular lords because of the vast estates under their hand.

CLERICAL ORDERS

In the Laranian church a clerical order either has well defined terms of reference to work within, or is a political/religious faction. Not all priests or temples are associated with a clerical order. Orders are often founded to represent a particular school of doctrinal thought, to accomplish a specific task, or to spread the word of Larani to outlying districts. In a few instances, orders have been created in response to a grant of land from a secular lord, who wished to demonstrate his piety by means of the bequest. Many of the orders founded by the latter method do not long outlive their benefactor. Clerical orders are outside the mainstream of the sacred bureaucracy, although many are important pressure groups. Most sponsor their own fighting orders.

Turintesa (Clerical Grandmaster)

The role of the Turintesa depends primarily on the purposes and activities of his order. Generally he is more concerned with politics than spiritual matters, and interprets the directives or intent of the mainstream authorities. Appointments are generally made by the pontiff, although special dispensation has been given to a few orders to elect their own grandmaster.

Each Turintesa is assisted by one or more deputies who serve in his stead when the need arises and assist in the administrative and organizational work of the order.

FIGHTING ORDERS

Almost every clerical order maintains and commands its own fighting order. As is the case with clerical orders, fighting orders are often created to accomplish a specific task, such as protecting missionaries sent to an outlying district. Members serve as guards of Laranian and Peonian temples, and as warriors in the service of spiritual or secular lord. It is possible for a fighting order to be created without a sponsoring clerical order, although this is an extremely rare dispensation. As of 720 the only such order is the Company of the Holy Sepulchre which serves as the pontiff's guard at Tengela. Although they can trace their origin to the years before the creation of the pontificate, they were granted their charter by the pontiff Cerdan II in 542 TR.

Fighting orders are organized along the lines of feudal society, symbolizing the chivalric ideal so important to Laranian doctrine. Fighting orders maintain chapter houses as headquarters. Some hold huge estates, including mighty strongholds, and have hundreds of members. The chapter houses of the order also serve as a social club for members.

Chabla (Grandmaster)

The military commander of a fighting order. His duties include liason with the clerical grandmaster in addition to military organization and administration. Although this office is seldom filled by a priest, it is by no means unheard of. In any case the grandmaster is invariably well schooled in ritual and may serve as a "lay-priest" to his command. In some orders a secular lord is appointed grandmaster if such a move is deemed politically wise. In such cases the office of Chabla becomes essentially ceremonial, with the real work being done by one or more deputies. The Chabla is usually appointed by the clerical grandmaster of the sponsoring order.

Reblena (Commander)

The function of Reblena vary considerably. Many are commanders of a single chapter house or independent military unit. Others serve as deputies to the grandmaster, and still others are administrative officers of the order. They are under the command of the Chabla. Reblena are usually of noble birth.

Melana (Knight)

A member of the order who is of noble birth. These persons rank below the "officers" and above the commonality. Many Melana only serve the order "at need or desire" and are of independent means. Landholding nobility (who are adherants of Larani) often join a fighting order if one is located nearby.

Erana (Wandering Knight)

A knight who, by request, has temporarily left the chapter houses of his order to travel either for a specific or undefined purpose. The concepts of the Chivalric Code frequently results in Laranian knights undertaking quests or pilgrimages, or simply wandering in search of "chance encounter". An Erana who has not undertaken a specific duty is often in search of a task to try his skills and honor.

Meken (Soldier)

Soldier of the order of simple birth. There are also low ranking officers, the equivalents of corporals and sergeants, but most high officers in Laranian fighting orders are noble. It is very rare for a commoner to rise above this rank; the Chivalric Code and Tirithor are used as examples to show the "Holy Ordering of Man's Estate" and keep Mekens from resenting their station.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Vigil, canted prayer and meditation are common features of the worship of Larani. Sacrifice, usually in the form of coin or promised labour or service is not uncommon, although it is not usually a formal requirement. Some Laranians donate part of their income to the church, and wealthy secular lords are known to gift the church with tracts of land. Some of the monies gained in this manner are distributed as alms to the poor.

Laranian ceremonies can be divided loosely into two forms, the Soritir or low mass, and the Alamirata, the high rituals restricted to priests. Both rituals are described below, as is the Tirannon or "Gate of the Mighty" an important quasi-religious variation.

Soratir

These lay masses are held three times each month on the fifth, fifteenth and twenty fifth. In most temples the rites are led by the High Priest, although any master can officiate. Masses generally include a sermon from the priest, most of which consist of an example from the life of a saint or legendary hero. These sermons are intended to show the honor and piety to be won by those who are just and compassionate.

There is provision for private devotions within most Laranian temples. Generally these are small chambers with few artifacts except an altar. The private ceremony consists of silent prayer and meditation, designed to bring the adherant "nearer to Tirithor", and rededicate their devotion.

Worshippers can also make confession to a priest should they feel the need. This, and any penance prescribed by the priest, is considered to purify the soul and renew the spirit of the adherant. Priests usually assign penance based on their judgement of the severity of the sin. Penance may range from reciting a litany in praise of the goddess to performing some dangerous service.

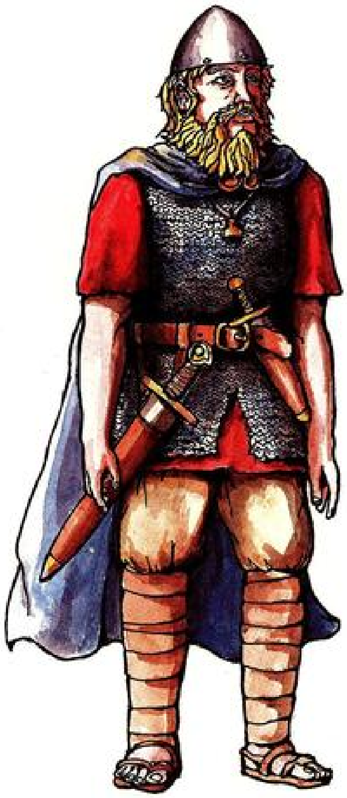
Alamirata

The Alamirata are the rituals of the Laranian church restricted to the clergy. In format they are very similar to the lay masses of the church. The primary difference is in the degree of ritual skill required to perform the "high masses". High rituals occur every five days beginning on the second of the month. Many priests often make private, daily devotion to Larani; some of the most devout will even invoke a penance upon themselves.

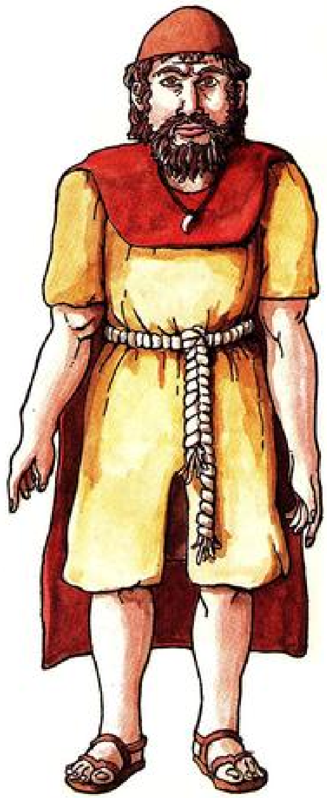
Tirannon

This is a lay ritual, that among noble adherants of Larani, is deemed to be the final step in becoming a knight. After a young man has been trained as a squire in the various "knightly virtues" and satisfies his master as to his ability, he is created knight and often presented with a horse and armour. On the day before an adherant of Larani becomes a knight he places his armour and weapons on an altar in a Laranian temple and keeps a twenty four hour vigil over them, praying

FORMAL CLERICAL ROBES



CHURCH OF SARAJIN



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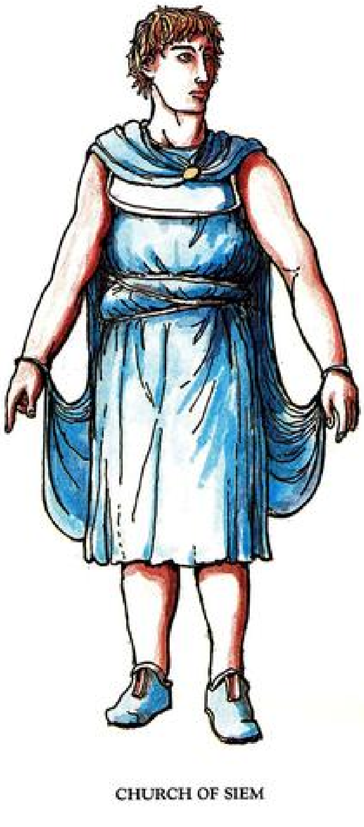

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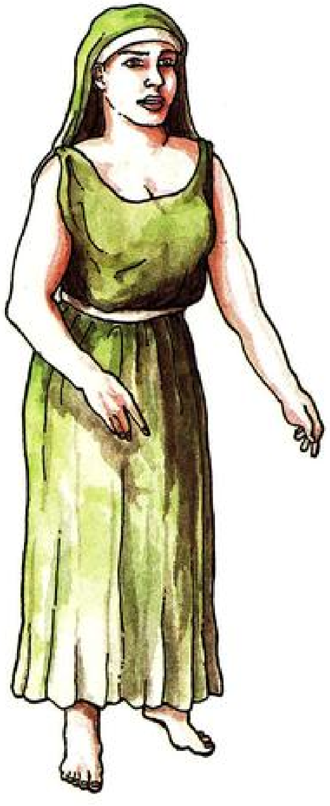

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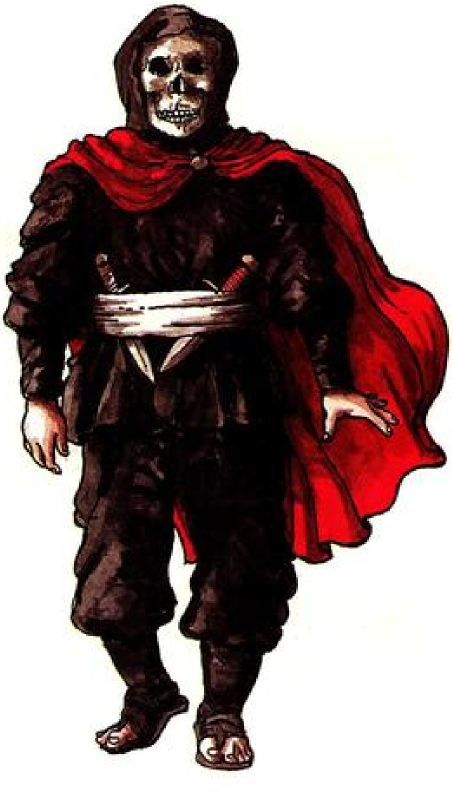


CHURCH OF NAVEH

CHURCH OF ILVIR

The illustrated cleric is an Ilviran High Priest. Formal robes of the church vary considerably from order to order, although the colours yellow and brown are reasonably constant. The priest shown is the High Priest of the order of the Pia-Gardith. Based in Golotha, it is one of the poorest of the Ilviran orders, and this is reflected in the modesty of its clerical robes. Around his neck he wears a pendant of the Sundered Claw, signifying his office.

CHURCH OF NAVEH

The priest depicted is a Dezena (Master of Ritual). He wears a ceremonial over-robe of scarlet, symbolic of high office in the church. He has donned the Ko-Shinkra, the skull mask of imminent death. This mask is worn by Dezenas before making sacrifice, and by other masters when ordering the Herth-akan (the murderous ritual of internal discipline). He also wears a white belt, denoting that he has been, or is, a temple assassin. In his belt are thrust the two razor sharp daggers carried by all Navehan clerics.

CHURCH OF PEONI

The illustration shows an Ebasethe (temple priestess) of the female order of the Balm of Joy. She is dressed in the green robes of spring. There are no special formal robes for Peonian clerics. The white band on her headdress signifies that she is the assistant of the Lerovana (Master of Healing). Ebasethe assigned to the Pelnala (High Priest) wear a beige band, and those assisting the Avasana (Master of Archives and Treasures) wear yellow. Priests and priestesses not on semi-permanent assignment to a temple master (the majority) wear no identifying band. Temple masters wear pendants to signify their office.

CHURCH OF SARAJIN

The priest shown is the Valhakar (clanhead) of a Sarajinian clerical clan. There is almost nothing in the way of formal regalia in the Sarajinian church; most priests are warriors and dress accordingly. Around his neck he wears a silver pendant symbolic of Fakang, the great battleaxe of Sarajin.

CHURCH OF SIEM

The illustration depicts an Inthiar (priest), dressed in the light blue robes of the celebration of the Night of High Perspective. The robes worn on the Night of Silent Renewal are darker blue. There is little formal regalia in the church of Siem. Higher ranking clerics may or may not wear adornments or badges of rank, depending primarily on personal taste.

CHURCH OF AGRIK

The illustration shows an Agrikan Aperagris (Master of the High Discipline), dressed in the ceremonial costume worn to officiate at High Balefire rituals. He bears the mace that is the symbol of his office, and is armed with the Tazhan, "the blade of the last cut", his sacrificial knife. Around his neck he wears a medallion depicting the flames of Balgashang, symbolic of the church of Agrik. The formal robes of Agrikan priests reflect the strong Azeryani cultural influence in the church.

CHURCH OF HALEA

The priestess illustrated is an Aramia, a Queen Mistress of the Temple or High Priestess. She is dressed in the typical diaphanous robes of a Halean priestess. The badge of her office is the design on the edge of the train attached to her headdress. She wears bells at her ankles and wrists which are symbolic of the goddess.

CHURCH OF LARANI

The priest depicted is an Obasaran (Master of Secular Affairs), dressed in the robes suitable for attending the Alamirata (High Mass). The red trim on the hem of his robes indicates that he is a temple master; simple priests are only allowed red trim around the collar and sleeves, and acolytes wear scarlet collars. As a general rule, the higher the office held in the church, the more red in the formal robes of the priest. Laranian clerical robes are meant to be symbolic of their concept that the priesthood is something that simultaneously defends and must be defended.

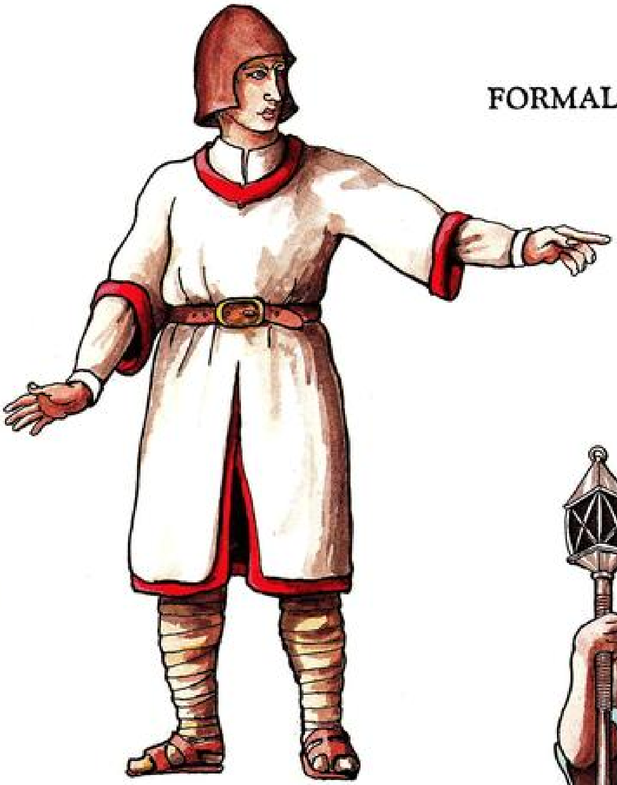
CHURCH OF MORGATH

The illustration shows a Khidarmur (High Priest) dressed in preparation for the Tenth Degree of Nyardath (High Ritual Ceremony). At his throat he wears the Durangash, symbolic of the church of Morgath. He wears the Hyadak mask to terrify the sacrificial victim and to hide his identity. All Morgathian priests wear similar masks although each will be unique. Masks are constructed either of carved wood or stiff, painted leather. They are usually made by the priest himself, and modified or replaced as necessary. In areas where the church of Morgath is legal it is not unusual for clerics to wear their masks in public.

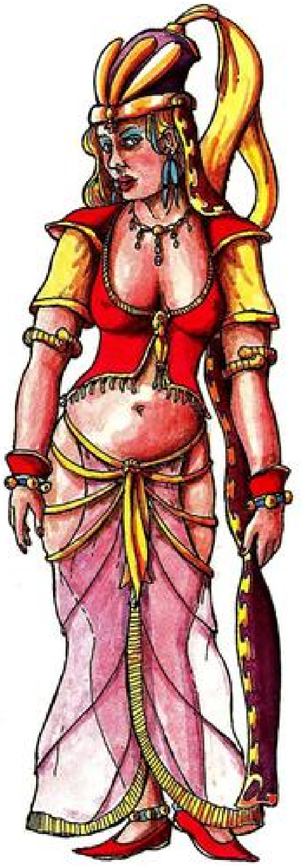
CHURCH OF SAVE-K'NOR

The illustration shows a Serinti (Keeper of the Holy Lore) of the order of the Shea-al-Aecor. He holds a staff with a replica of Uhla, the black lantern, symbolic of his administrative office. Around his left eye he bears the hexagonal tattoo which he received after graduating from the ranks of the Manidar (acolytes) to the Haliki (priesthood). His robes are trimmed with blue, signifying that he is also a Rowanti (loremaster), a master of at least one field of learning.

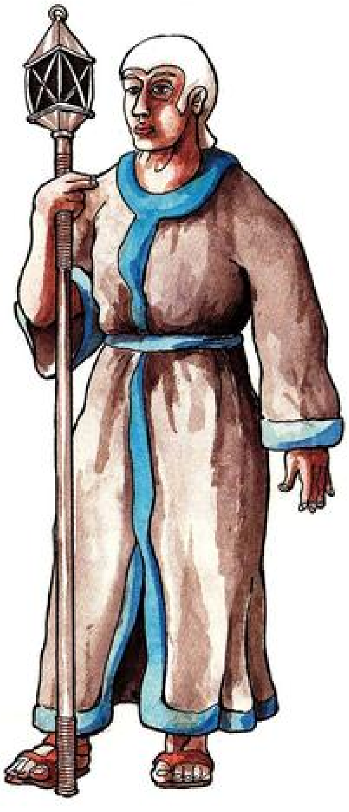
FORMAL CLERICAL ROBES



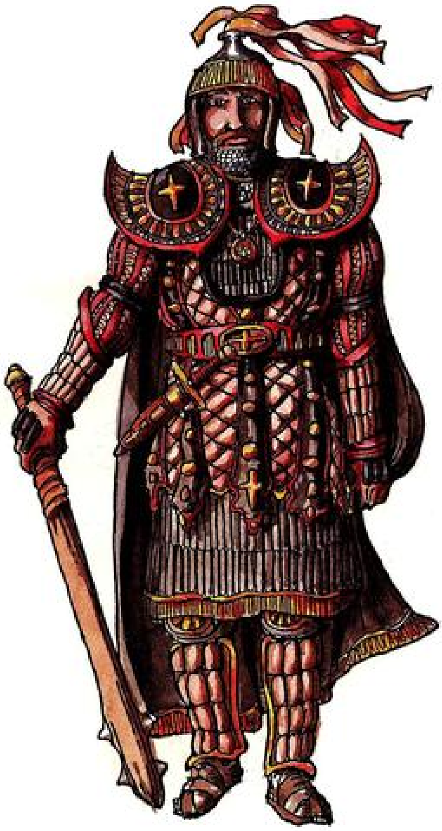
CHURCH OF LARANI



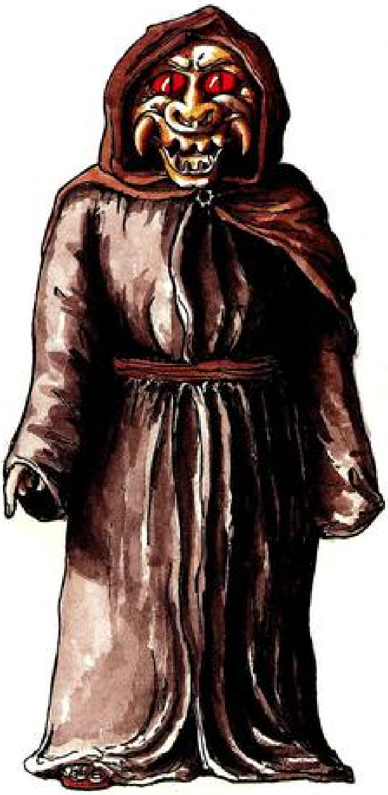
CHURCH OF HALEA



CHURCH OF SAVE-K'NOR



CHURCH OF AGRIK



CHURCH OF MORGATH

Information regarding specific dates can be found by checking under the month and the day. Dates are briefly described by listing first the religion, then the official name, and thirdly a brief description if necessary. As a general rule, lay masses are open to any adherant of the deity and high masses are restricted to the clergy. Detailed notes on the festival or ceremony can be found in the appropriate religious article.

It should be noted that the masses and festivals listed are not necessarily all inclusive. For example, the Peonian and Laranian churches celebrate numerous saints days, and the dates of lay rituals of the church of Ilvir vary from temple to temple.

AZURA

4 Peoni-Harvest Home Festival
5 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
6 Save-K'nor-Velere (lay mass)
7 Halea-Shesneala Day (lay mass)
8 Agrik-Low Ceremony of the Balefire (lay mass)
12 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
13 Morgath-Degrees of Nyardath (high mass)
14-17 Peoni-Greater Sapelah (purification ritual)
15 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
15 Siem-Night of Golden Twilight (high mass)
20 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
25 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
26 Morgath-Shadryn-Vars (lay mass)
28 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
30 Siem-Night of Silent Renewal (lay mass)
30 Naveh-Dezenaka (high mass)

HALANE

1-7 Halea-The Banquet of Delight Festival
4 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
5 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
6 Save-K'nor-Velere (lay mass)
8 Agrik-Low Ceremony of the Balefire (lay mass)
12 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
13 Morgath-Degrees of Nyardath (high mass)
14-17 Peoni-Greater Sapelah (purification ritual)
15 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
15 Siem-Night of High Perspective (lay mass)
20 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
25 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
26 Morgath-Shadryn-Vars (lay mass)
28 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
30 Siem-Night of Silent Renewal (lay mass)
30 Naveh-Dezenaka (high mass)

SAVOR

4 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
5 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
6 Save-K'nor-Keserne (Saints mass)
7 Halea-Shesneala Day (lay mass)
8 Agrik-Low Ceremony of the Balefire (lay mass)
12 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
13 Morgath-Degrees of Nyardath (high mass)
14-17 Peoni-Greater Sapelah (purification ritual)
15 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
15 Siem-Night of High Perspective (lay mass)
20 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
25 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
26 Morgath-Shadryn-Vars (lay mass)
28 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
30 Siem-Night of Silent Renewal (lay mass)
30 Naveh-Dezenaka (high mass)

ILVIN

4 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
5 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
6 Save-K'nor-Velere (lay mass)
7 Halea-Shesneala Day (lay mass)
8 Agrik-Low Ceremony of the Balefire (lay mass)
12 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
13 Morgath-Degrees of Nyardath (high mass)
14-17 Peoni-Greater Sapelah (purification ritual)
15 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
15 Siem-Night of High Perspective (lay mass)
16-30 Ilvir-The Araksin Festival
20 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
25 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
26 Morgath-Shadryn-Vars (lay mass)
28 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
30 Siem-Night of Silent Renewal (lay mass)
30 Naveh-Dezenaka (high mass)

NAVEK

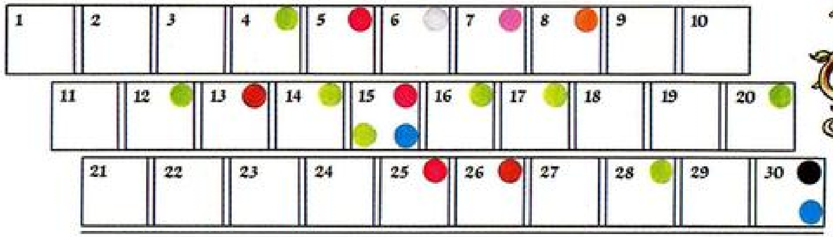
4 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
5 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
6 Save-K'nor-Velere (lay mass)
7 Halea-Shesneala Day (lay mass)
8 Agrik-Low Ceremony of the Balefire (lay mass)
12 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
13 Morgath-Degrees of Nyardath (high mass)
14-17 Peoni-Greater Sapelah (purification ritual)
15 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
15 Siem-Night of High Perspective (lay mass)
20 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
25 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
26 Morgath-Shadryn-Vars (lay mass)
28 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
30 Siem-Night of Silent Renewal (lay mass)
30 Naveh-Night of Shadows

MORGAT

1 Naveh-Shadowmath
1-13 Morgath-The Feast of Bukrai (the first is the Sacrament of Kobukrai, the thirteenth is the Liturgy of Vabukrai)
4 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
5 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
6 Save-K'nor-Velere (lay mass)
7 Halea-Shesneala Day (lay mass)
8 Agrik-Low Ceremony of the Balefire (lay mass)
12 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
14-17 Peoni-Greater Sapelah (purification ritual)
15 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
15 Siem-Night of High Perspective (lay mass)
20 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
25 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
26 Morgath-Shadryn-Vars (lay mass)
28 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
30 Siem-Night of Silent Renewal (lay mass)
30 Naveh-Dezenaka (high mass)

RELIGIOUS CALENDAR

NUZYAEL



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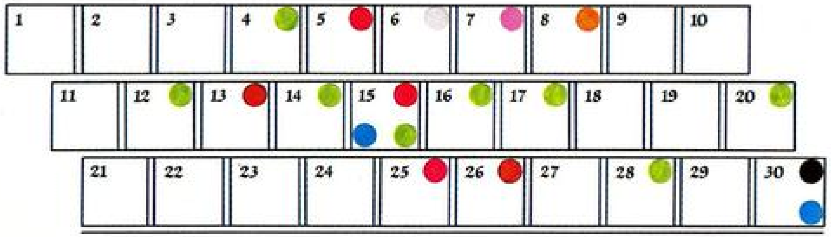
PEONU



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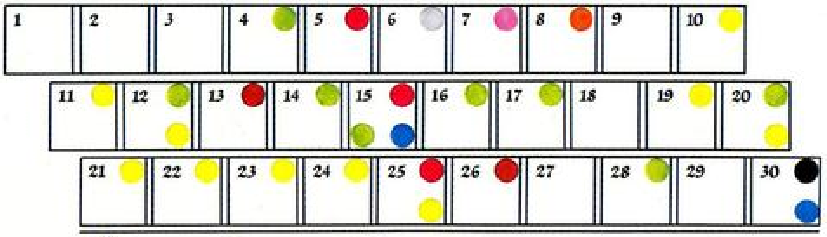
KELEN



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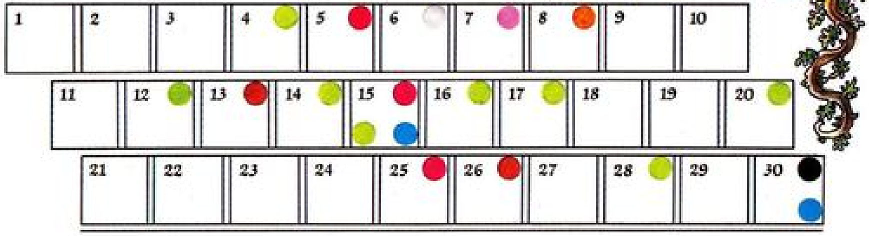
NOLUS



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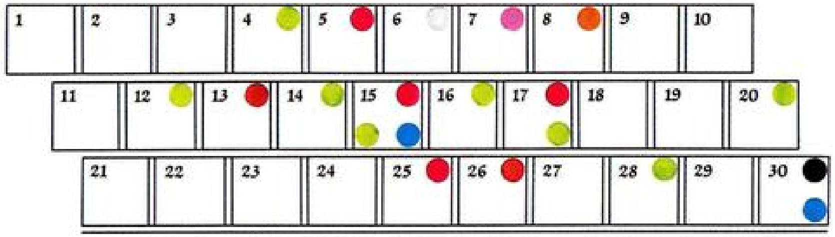
LARANE



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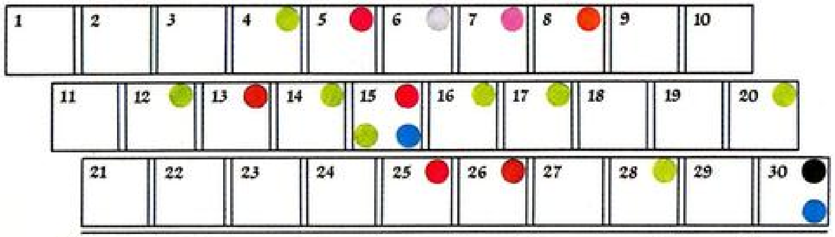
AGRAZHAR



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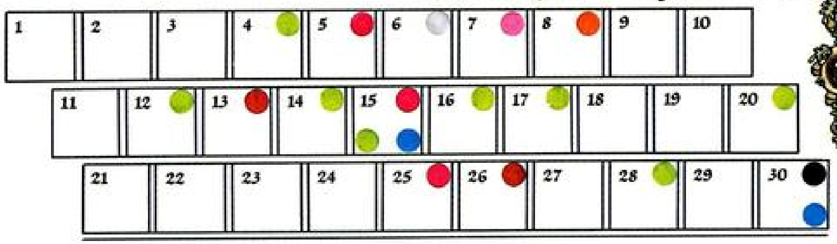
AZURA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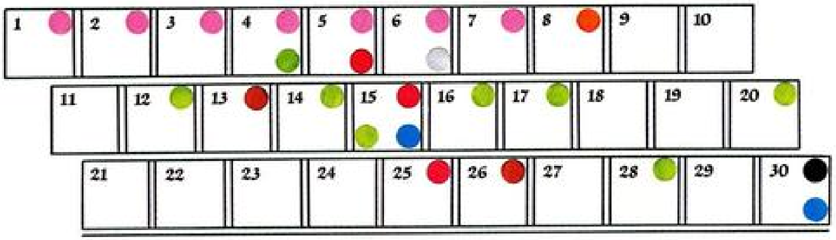
HALANE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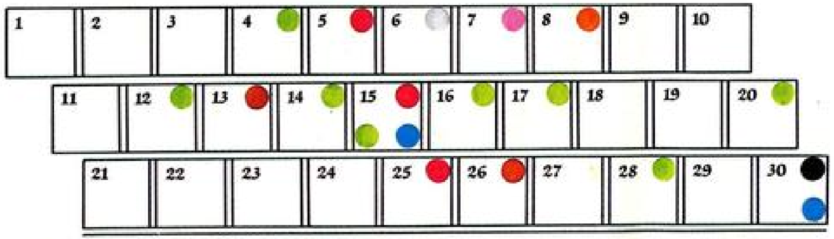
SAVOR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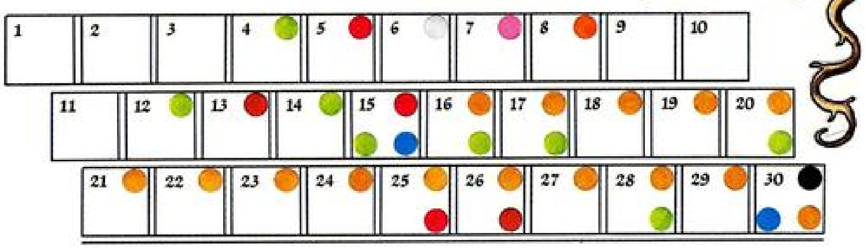
ILVIN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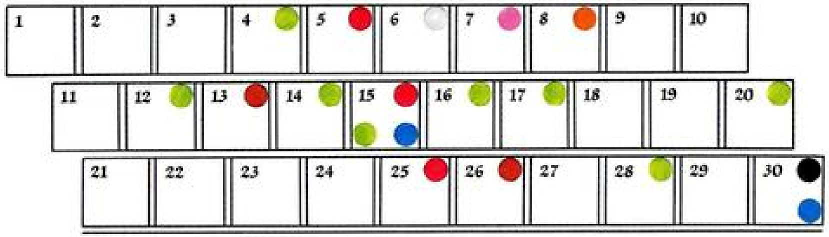
NAVEK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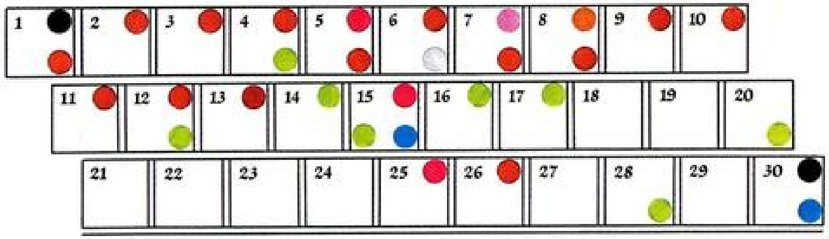
MORGAT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TRIM HERE

KEY

The coloured dots on the calendar indicate important dates to the various religions of western Lythia. The colours are keyed below.

Agrik–*Orange*
Halea–*Pink*
Ilvir–*Sand*
Larani–*Red*
Morgath–*Brown*
Naveh–*Black*
Peoni–*Green*
Sarajin–*Yellow*
Save-K'nor–*Grey*
Siem–*Blue*

NUZYAEL

4 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
5 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
6 Save-K'nor-Velere (lay mass)
7 Halea-Shesneala Day (lay mass)
8 Agrik-Low Ceremony of the Balefire (lay mass)
12 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
13 Morgath-Degrees of Nyardath (high mass)
14-17 Peoni-Greater Sapelah (purification ritual)
15 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
15 Siem-Night of High Perspective (lay mass)
20 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
25 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
26 Morgath-Shadryn-Vars (lay mass)
28 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
30 Siem-Night of Silent Renewal (lay mass)
30 Naveh-Dezenaka (high mass)

PEONU

4 Peoni Restoration Festival
5 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
6 Save-K'nor-Velere (lay mass)
7 Halea-Shesneala Day (lay mass)
8 Agrik-Low Ceremony of the Balefire (lay mass)
12 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
13 Morgath-Degrees of Nyardath (high mass)
14-17 Peoni-Greater Sapelah (purification ritual)
15 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
15 Siem-Night of High Perspective (lay mass)
20 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
25 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
26 Morgath-Shadryn-Vars (lay mass)
28 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
30 Siem-Night of Silent Renewal (lay mass)
30 Naveh-Dezenaka (high mass)

KELEN

(Note: Ivinians call this month Saraju)

4 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
5 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
6 Save-K'nor-Velere (lay mass)
7 Halea-Shesneala Day (lay mass)
8 Agrik-Low Ceremony of the Balefire (lay mass)
10-12 Sarajin-Ilbengaad Festival
12 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
13 Morgath-Degrees of Nyardath (high mass)
14-17 Peoni-Greater Sapelah (purification ritual)
15 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
15 Siem-Night of High Perspective (lay mass)
19-25 Sarajin-Bjarri's Feast
20 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
25 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
26 Morgath-Shadryn-Vars (lay mass)
28 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
30 Siem-Night of Silent Renewal (lay mass)
30 Naveh-Dezenaka (high mass)

NOLUS

4 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
5 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
6 Save-K'nor-Velere (lay mass)
7 Halea-Shesneala Day (lay mass)
8 Agrik-Low Ceremony of the Balefire (lay mass)
12 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
13 Morgath-Degrees of Nyardath (high mass)
14-17 Peoni-Greater Sapelah (purification ritual)
15 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
15 Siem-Night of High Perspective (lay mass)
20 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
25 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
26 Morgath-Shadryn-Vars (lay mass)
28 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
30 Siem-Night of Silent Renewal (lay mass)
30 Naveh-Dezenaka (high mass)

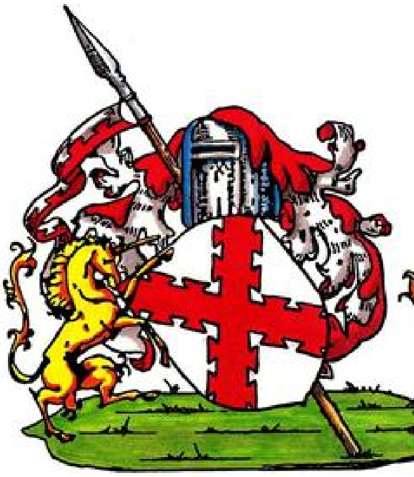
LARANE

4 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
5 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
6 Save-K'nor-Velere (lay mass)
7 Halea-Shesneala Day (lay mass)
8 Agrik-Low Ceremony of the Balefire (lay mass)
12 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
13 Morgath-Degrees of Nyardath (high mass)
14-17 Peoni-Greater Sapelah (purification ritual)
15 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
15 Siem-Night of High Perspective (lay mass)
17 Larani-Feast of Saint Ambrathas
20 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
25 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
26 Morgath-Shadryn-Vars (lay mass)
28 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
30 Siem-Night of Silent Renewal (lay mass)
30 Naveh-Dezenaka (high mass)

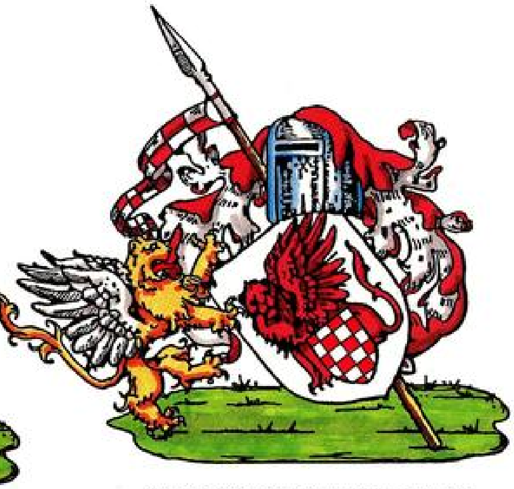
AGRAZHAR

4 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
5 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
6 Save-K'nor-Velere (lay mass)
7 Halea-Shesneala Day (lay mass)
8 Agrik-Feast of Balefire
12 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
13 Morgath-Degrees of Nyardath (high mass)
14-17 Peoni-Greater Sapelah (purification ritual)
15 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
15 Siem-Night of High Perspective (lay mass)
20 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
25 Larani-Soratir (lay mass)
26 Morgath-Shadryn-Vars (lay mass)
28 Peoni-Lesser Sapelah (lay mass)
30 Siem-Night of Silent Renewal (lay mass)
30 Naveh-Dezenaka (high mass)

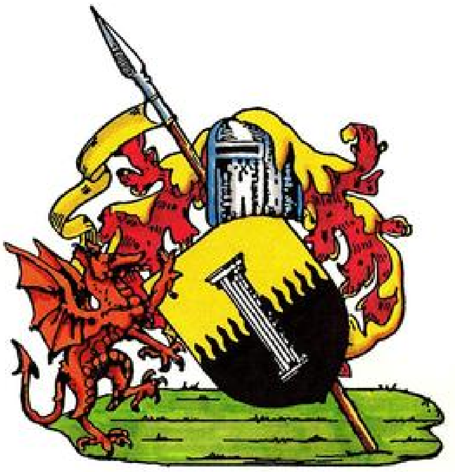
ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE FIGHTING ORDERS OF HARN



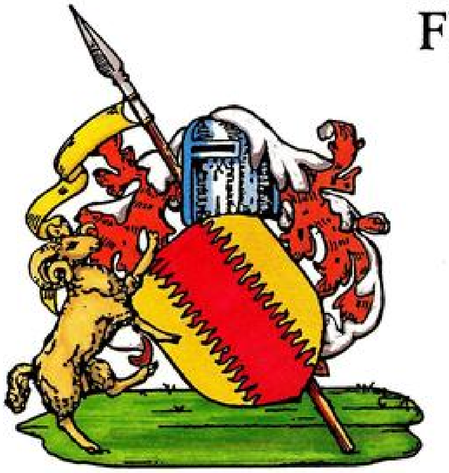
LADY OF PALADINS



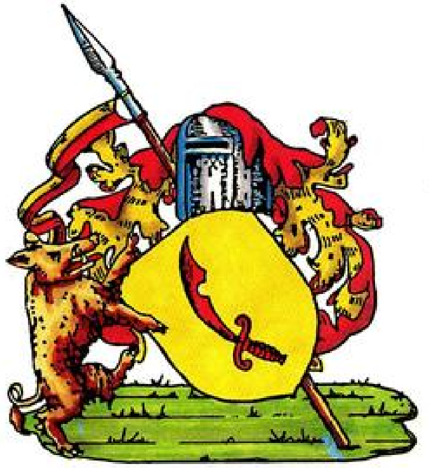
CHECKERED SHIELD



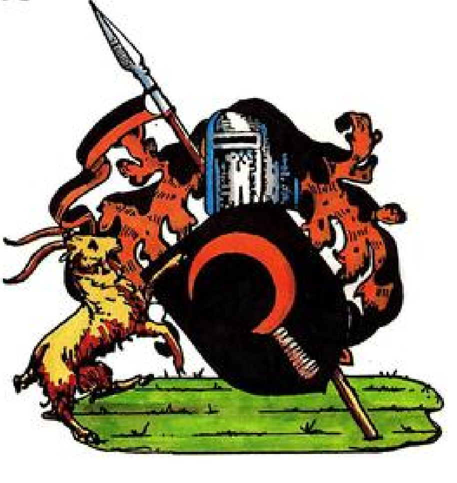
COMPANIONS OF ROVING DOOM



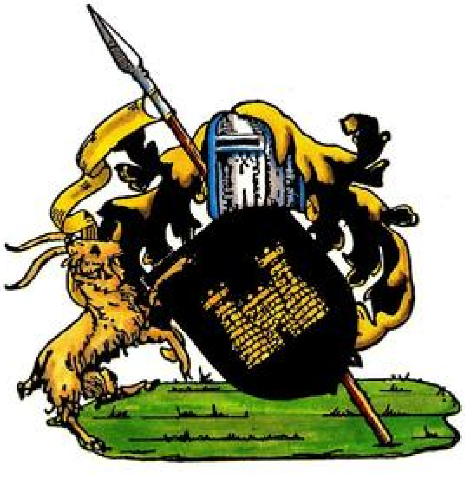
DEMON PAMESHLU THE INSATIABLE



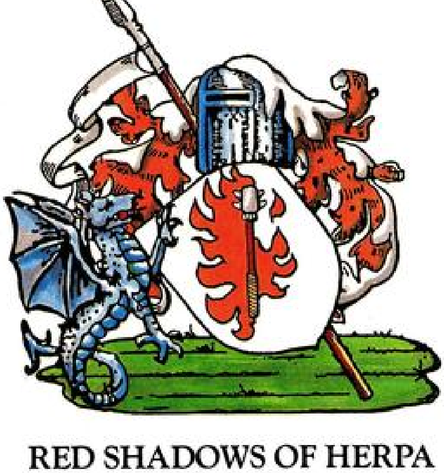
COHORTS OF GASHANG



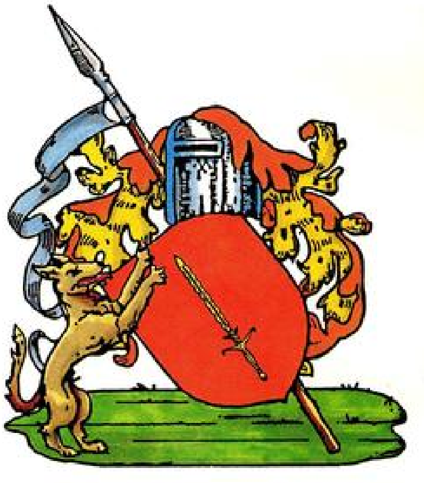
COMPANY OF THE COPPER HOOK



CRIMSON DANCER



RED SHADOWS OF HERPA



WARRIORS OF MAMEKA

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE FIGHTING ORDERS OF HARN

ORDER OF THE CHECKERED SHIELD
(Larani)

Argent, a winged lion sejant gules, and a chequey of twenty two, gules and argent. Supporter: A winged lion rampant proper with wings argent.
Motto: *Guard the meek.*
Registry: Violet Mantle 628
Sponsor: The Order of Hyvrik
Holdings: Menekod (Kand)

ORDER OF THE COHORTS OF GASHANG
(Agrik)

Gold, a seax gules. Supporter: A boar rampant proper.
Motto: *Purge the unclean.*
Registry: Palace of Gules 714
Sponsor: Order of the Eight Demons
Holdings: Themeson (Araku)

ORDER OF THE COMPANIONS OF ROVING DOOM
(Agrik)

Party per fess rayonne gold and sable, a column argent. Mantling: Gules and gold. Supporter: A dragon rampant tenne.
Motto: *Live bold and prosper.*
Registry: Sanguine Saltire 652
Sponsor: Order of the Pillar of Fire
Holdings: Arketh (Araku)

ORDER OF THE COMPANY OF THE COPPER HOOK
(Agrik)

Sable, a copper sickle proper. Mantling: Tenne and sable. Supporter: A goat rampant proper.
Motto: *Never forget.*
Registry: Sanguine Saltire 681
Sponsor: Order of the Fuming Gate
Holdings: Hyen (Araku)

ORDER OF THE CRIMSON DANCER
(Agrik)

Sable, a castle gold. Supporter: A goat rampant proper.
Motto: *Let widows weep.*
Registry: Grey Whale 704
Sponsor: Order of the Kukshin
Holdings: Quimen (Taareskeld)

ORDER OF DEMON PAMESHLU THE INSATIABLE
(Agrik)

Gold, a pale rayonne. Mantling: Tenne and argent. Supporter: A ram rampant proper.
Motto: *By fury's blessing.*
Registry: Alachai Palace 606
Sponsor: Order of the Octagonal Pit
Holdings: None

ORDER OF THE LADY OF PALADINS
(Larani)

Argent, a saltire dovetailed gules. Supporter: A unicorn rampant gold.
Motto: *With righteous blade.*
Registry: Golden Orb 575
Sponsor: Order of the Spear of Shattered Sorrow
Holdings: Cundras (Toron) Fosumo (Toron)

ORDER OF THE RED SHADOWS OF HERPA
(Agrik)

Argent, a flaming mace proper and tenne. Supporter: A wyvern erect azure.
Motto: *Stand in the blood of glory.*
Registry: Sanguine Saltire 692
Sponsor: Order of Herpa the Mace
Holdings: Menekai (Araku)

ORDER OF THE WARRIORS OF MAMEKA
(Agrik)

Tenne, a ceremonial sword gold. Supporter: A wolf salient proper.
Motto: *No quarter.*
Registry: Sanguine Saltire 698
Sponsor: Order of Mamaka the Master of Steel
Holdings: Bedenes (Araku)

Format
These are shortened register entries. Registers generally allow at least one full page for each order. All of the above are sufficiently important to merit several pages in most registers.

Sponsor
The sponsoring clerical order of the fighting order.

Holdings
Castles and keeps held by the order and from whom they are held (the liege).

Registry
The college enclave and date of the most recent registration and/or amendment. It should be noted that the Order of Demon Pameshlu the Insatiable's registry is with the Azeryan Empire's College of Heralds. Components of many of the achievements, particularly the arms and specific charges have more ancient association with the religion or its adherants.

BADGES OF THE CLERICAL ORDERS OF HARN

AGRIK, Church of
Sable, flames tenne.
Registry: Alachai Palace (Azeryan) 321

THE ORDER OF THE EIGHT DEMONS
Gold, eight decrescents sable.
Registry: Palace of Gules (Tharda) 714

THE ORDER OF THE FUMING GATE
Sable, a portcullis tenne.
Registry: Sanguine Saltire (Rethem) 681

THE ORDER OF HERPA THE MACE
Azure, a flaming mace proper.
Registry: Sanguine Saltire (Rethem) 689

THE ORDER OF KUKSHIN
Tenne, a spur gold.
Registry: Sanguine Saltire (Rethem) 676

THE ORDER OF MAMAKA THE MASTER OF STEEL
Party per pale gules and gold, a broad arrow argent.
Registry: Sanguine Saltire (Rethem) 696

THE ORDER OF THE OCTAGONAL PIT
Sable, an octagon tenne and flames of the first.
Registry: Alachai Palace (Azeryan) 606

THE ORDER OF THE PILLAR OF FIRE
Flames tenne, a column gold.
Registry: Sanguine Saltire (Rethem) 651

HALEA, Church of
Azure, a hawk's bell gold.
Registry: Hundred Oars (Karejia) 413

THE ORDER OF THE SILKEN VOICE
Purpure, a roundel gold.
Registry: Palace of Gules (Tharda) 630

ILVIR, Church of
Party per pale gold and sanguine, a severed claw argent.
Registry: Golden Orb (Melderyn) 672

LARANI, Church of
Party per pale gules and argent, a sword proper.
Registry: Seven Quills (Trierzon) 229

THE ORDER OF HYVRIK
A chequey of twenty one, argent and gules.
Registry: Violet Mantle (Kanday) 593

THE ORDER OF THE SPEAR OF SHATTERED SORROW
Gules, a spear head and shaft proper.
Registry: Golden Orb (Melderyn) 471

MORGATH, Church of
The Durangash proper.
Registry: Alachai Palace (Azeryan) 361

NAVEH, Church of
Sable, a human skull proper.
Registry: Alachai Palace (Azeryan) 430

PEONI, Church of
The Peonian church is unique in that there is no universal badge for the entire religion.

THE ORDER OF THE BALM OF JOY
Vert, a daisy proper.
Registry: Seven Quills (Trierzon) 294

THE IRREPROACHABLE ORDER
Sanguine, a garb proper.
Registry: Seven Quills (Trierzon) 297

SARAJIN, Church of
Gold, two handaxes crossed proper.
Registry: Dragon Herald (Ivinia) 687

SAVE-K'NOR, Church of
Purpure, the Uhla proper.
Registry: Silver Orb (Emelrene) 579

THE ORDER OF THE HYN-AELORI
The Hyn-Aelori uses the symbol of the open, blank book. The exact colouring varies considerably.
Registry: Silver Orb (Emelrene) 579

THE ORDER OF THE RYDEQUELYN
The Rydequelyn uses the unrolled blank scroll as a symbol. The exact colouring varies.
Registry: Silver Orb (Emelrene) 579

THE ORDER OF THE SHEA-AL-AECOR
Vert, a bottle and quill proper.
Registry: Silver Orb (Emelrene) 579

SIEM, Church of
Vert, a bowl azure.
Registry: Silver Harp (Evael) 401

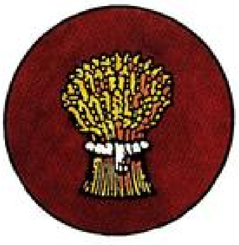
Format
These are shortened register entries. Registers generally allow at least one full page for each entry.

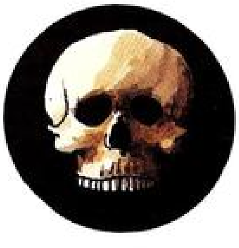
Badges
Religious badges are generally of two types. For most churches there is one badge that represents the entire religion, and another for each clerical order. Use of these badges is generally regulated by the internal hierarchy of the church, although there are certain universal rules (see below). In the case of certain churches (Ilvir for example) there are no distinct badges for the orders or temples; each uses a variant of the religious badge. Note that clerical badges often tend towards considerable stylization.

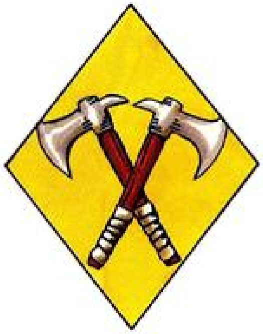
Badges are not deemed proper heraldic devices, although the College of Heralds will register them. Many of the rules that apply to heraldic achievements are only loosely applied to badges. There are strict limitations on the way in which badges can be displayed. They may not take the shape of a knight's shield although they may be round, lozengy or square. They may not exceed six inches in diameter when worn on garments, nor may they usually be worn in the centre of the chest or back. They may not be made into banners or flags or painted on shields.

Registry
The college enclave and date of the most recent registration or amendment. The word in brackets indicates the location of the applicable college.

BADGES OF THE CLERICAL ORDERS OF HARN


IRREPROACHABLE ORDER


NAVEH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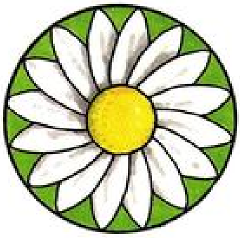
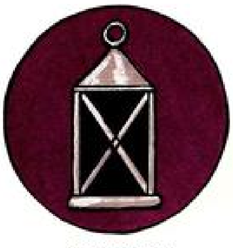
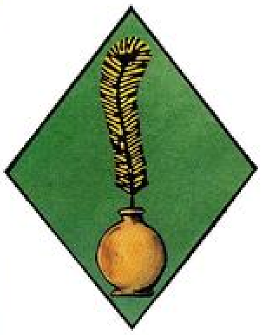
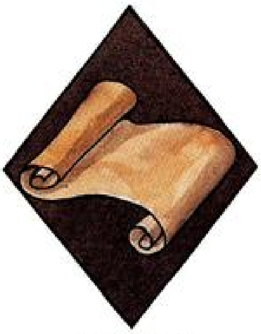
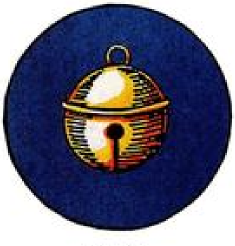
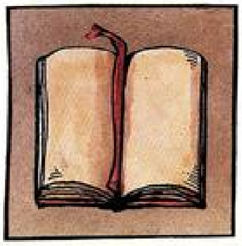

BALM OF JOY

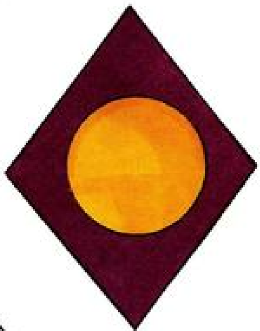

SAVE-K'NOR

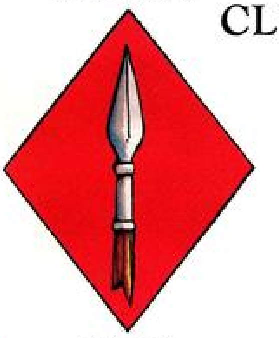

SHEA-AL-AECOR

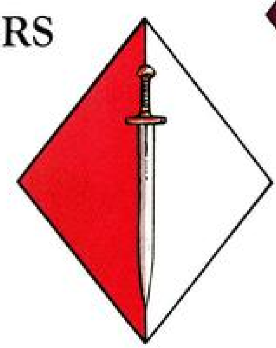

RYDEQUELYN


HALEA


HYN-AELORI


SILKEN VOICE


SPEAR OF SHATTERED SORROW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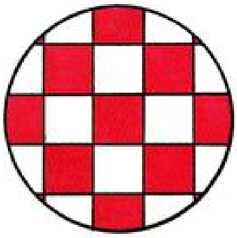
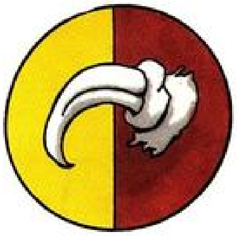

HYVRIK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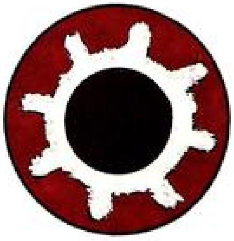
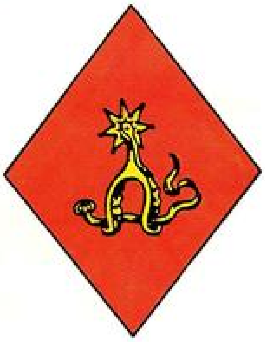
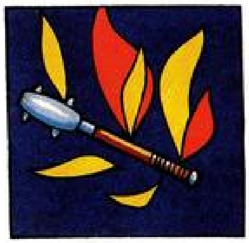
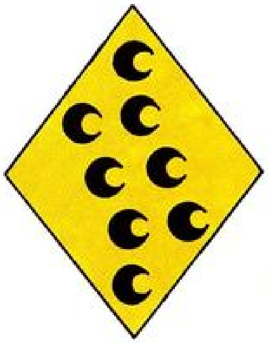
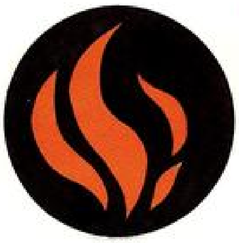
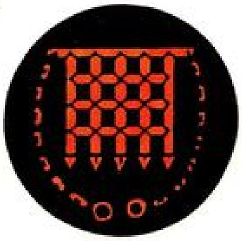

MORGATH

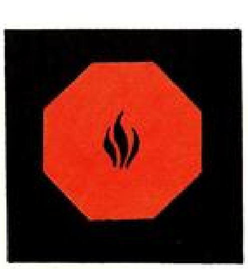

KUKSHIN

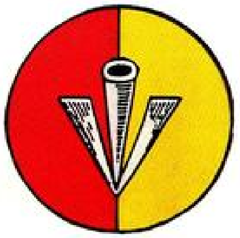

HERPA THE MACE

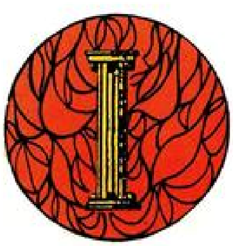

EIGHT DEMONS

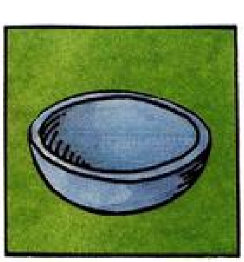

AGRIK


FUMING GATE

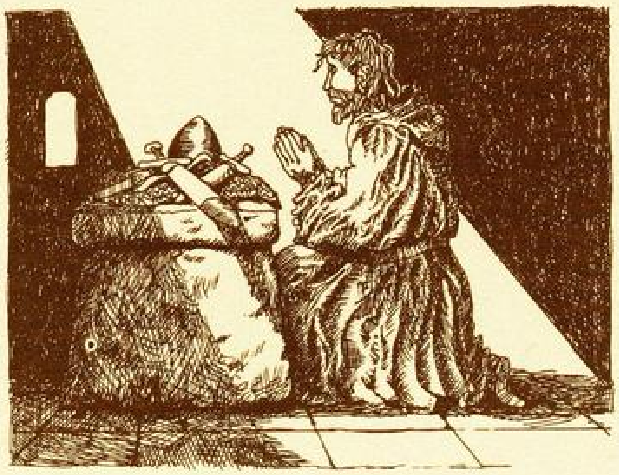

OCTAGONAL PIT


MAMAKA THE MASTER OF STEEL


PILLAR OF FIRE


SIEM

for the diety to bless him and his war gear, and meditating on the holy virtues of a "perfect knight". During this time he neither eats nor drinks and it is considered a lessening of the sacrament to interrupt him before the end of the ritual.



The church of Larani created the ritual of Tirannon, the "Gate of the Mighty", with the growth of the feudalism, in an effort to appeal to the nobility. While most knightly adherants of Larani have undergone the Tirannon it is not absolutely necessary, with the exception of those knights who join Laranian fighting orders. In the latter case, the ceremony is required, even if the knight in question has previously undertaken it.

CANON LAW

The church of Larani settles most internal disputes either by inquest and arbitration, trial by ordeal or trial by combat. The method chosen is dependant on the alleged crime and the social status of the disputants. Generally, persons bound over for canon trial by secular authorities will face trial by ordeal, most often by dropping the accused into a tank of consecrated water. Those who sink are deemed to be innocent and are rescued.

Trial by combat is generally restricted to the noble members of fighting orders, although in theory, any disputant who is a member of the church can claim the right. Punishment inflicted on those found guilty vary with the crime, the circumstances and often by the social status of the convicted person. Laranian courts have been known to ask for the death penalty for certain crimes, particularly heresy, descration of church property, and breach of temple privilege. Ironically, it is the Laranian church that most often requests the penalty of death by burning for adherants of Agrik in those jurisdictions where worship of that god is illegal.

The Laranian church has vested considerable power in its central and regional organizations. As a result the pontiff, primates, and archbishop have various powers that are ostensibly designed to protect the church from internal heresies. Unfortunately, these powers have sometimes been misused for personal ends by unscrupulous persons.

The interdict is perhaps the most devastating power that can be used by the Laranian senior clergy. An interdict can be directed against a particular temple, order, bishopric, or primacy by the ranking priest responsible for that area. An interdict prohibits the performance of Laranian divine service and the administration of religious ritual. Although it is most often used as a last resort against extremely corrupt priests, more than one secular lord has been threatened with it, sometimes for less than "holy" reasons. In areas where the church of Larani is paramount, this is no casual matter and most lords have given in, or at least compromised, with the church.

SYMBOLS AND REGALIA

The colours red and white (silver) have particular significance to the Laranian church. In particular, any red and white chequer is considered symbolic of Hyvrik, Larani's shield. The Laranian church has recently adopted the heraldic winged lion as one of its symbols; it is normally depicted in red. The ritual robes of clerics varies according to region and circumstance, although it almost always is dominated by the colours red and white. In some areas priestly robes give the appearance of stylized knights, in others an attempt is made by the priests to appear vulnerable, "the maiden to be protected". The formal robes of high ranking clergy can be very ornate.

CALENDAR

The most important celebration of the Laranian year is the seventeenth of Larane, the Feast of Saint Ambrathas. This symbolizes the legendary events of the capture of Alamire and the foundation of the church. In many areas temples sponsor tournaments between "knights of good heart". Other activities include a special lay mass and night long meditation and prayer by the priests.

GEOGRAPHY

The church of Larani is one of the fastest growing and most widespread in western Lythia. The last two centuries have seen vast increases in the wealth, power and size of the church. Because of its strong appeal to the warrior nobility, particularly in feudal states, it is often very influential in secular politics.

The church is illegal in the Harnic kingdoms of Rethem and Orbaal, but it is generally at least tolerated in most regions. In Trierzon, Kaldor, Melderyn, Kanday and Emelrene the church is particularly strong.

THE HARNIC CHURCH

The date that the first Laranian missionaries arrived on Harn is unknown, although it is likely that the church was established as early as the first century BT. As feudal kingdoms prospered so did the church, which has grown steadily and suffered few serious setbacks. There are two Laranian clerical orders present on Harn; each sponsors its own fighting-order. These exist primarily for geographical reasons.

Order Of The Spear Of Shattered Sorrow

At one time the only clerical order of the church of Larani on Harn, it has confined its activities to eastern Harn since 622. The order's chief temple and the headquarters of the Harnic primate is in Thay. Other major temples are in Cherafir and Tashal. The Order was founded on Harn in 465 long after the church was established on the island. The usual practice, in "frontier" areas such as Harn, is for an order to be created to provide missionaries to "spread the faith". The order was sponsored by King Erebir of Melderyn. The grandmaster of the order and the primate of Harn is Kerthede of Talvail, a virtuous woman whose major failing is her lack of confidence.

Order Of The Lady Of Paladins

The fighting-order sponsored by the order of the Spear of Shattered Sorrow. Its original patron was King Poleryn who founded the order in 575 partly in response to the bloody turmoil that was then occurring in western Harn. The Lady of Paladins holds the keeps of Cundras and Fosumo in Melderyn. For the last twenty years the order has been acting with greater and greater autonomy, and not always in the "ideal" spirit of the faith. Knights of the order are currently engaged in the subjugation of Solora and "crusading" patrols are often found there. There have been disturbing reports of the order's activities against the Solori tribesmen. This is a matter of concern to both the Harnic primate and the pontiff, but to date no effective action has been taken against the order.

Order Of Hyvrik

Although the church of Larani has been present in western Harn for several centuries, it has had greater difficulties from both secular authorities and competing religions than has the eastern church. The growing church suffered its first significant setback in 491 when Saurach, the Corani Emperor, proclaimed the "Unification Writ" banning all religions except Agrik within the empire. A few hours after he issued the decree, Saurach was assasinated by a mysterious female warrior dressed in crimson robes who overpowered a bodyguard of fifteen men and cut Saurach in half with a single sword stroke. This event, particularly in light of the fact that the woman mysteriously disappeared, greatly increased the prestige of the Laranian church. The Unification Writ was quietly repealed by Saurach's successor.

The most serious threats to the western Laranian church occurred during the sixth century. The Balshan Jihad followed by the Theocracy of Tekhos resulted in widespread persecution of adherants of the Lady of Paladins and the destruction of most Laranian temples. Those clerics who were not slain were forced into hiding or exile. The eastern Laranian church sent such aid as was possible to their western colleagues and until the collapse of the Theocracy in 588 the church functioned largely as an underground resistance movement.

The Order of Hyvrik was formally created in 593 when they were granted land in the city of Aleath. The order takes its name from Larani's legendary red and white checkered shield. The order quickly spread throughout southwestern Harn. King Andasin I, the first ruler of Kanday, was a devout adherant of Larani and granted the order extensive lands. The Aleath temple is the headquarters of the order; other major temples are in Coranan and Shiran.

Order Of The Checkered Shield

The Order of the Checkered Shield was founded in 622 by Andasin I to guard the northern border of Kanday. The order quickly attracted many knights and soldiers and proved instrumental in capturing substantial lands for the young kingdom. The order's headquarters are at Menekod castle, which it seized from the Agrikan Order of the Copper Hook during Ezar's War. The Checkered Shield is renowned for its individual and collective military prowess, as well as for its chivalry. There is deep rooted hostility between the order and the Order of the Copper Hook, which holds Hyen keep about ten leagues from Menekod. There has been frequent skirmishing between the two orders since the end of Ezar's War.

THE IVINIAN CHURCH

Although there have been sporadic Laranian missionaries to the northlands for at least a century it is only since 696 that the church has made any serious attempt to make headway in Ivinia. The church has enjoyed little success among the northmen. Ivinian culture sees warfare as a way of life rather than a necessary evil and the concepts of honor are amply dealt with by the Ljarl of the Sarajinian church.

Order Of The Winged Lion

The order was founded in 602 in Trierzon, primarily as a political pressure group. It gradually fell into decline and was revived in 696 for the task of establishing the Laranian church in Ivinia. The order has built temples in the towns of Fuhreling and Jarehm. Both are dependent on aid from the central church. The Laranian primate is located in the Jarehm temple.

Order Of The Knights Of Avarkiel

The Knights of Avarkiel, like their sponsoring clerical order, were founded in Trierzon. Members of the order have always had a "crusading" bent, and are sometimes regarded as slightly fanatical. The order did not suffer the same decline as did the order of the Winged Lion, and although its membership was relatively small, it was a minor irritant to the regional authority. It is sometimes speculated that the reason for the pontifical decision to establish missionaries in Ivinia was to move the Knights of Avarkiel away from the centres of Laranian power. The order has attracted very few Ivinian members.

Tormentor of the Unlamented Dead, Master of the Principle of Evil, Lord of the Gulmorvrin of the Black Pit, Wielder of the Shadow of Incarnate Evil, Wreaker of Chaos."

Morgath is the master of chaos and evil. Of all the Gods he is the quickest to anger and the most prone to violence and insanity. He is a lord of retribution, but cares nothing for justice, and is said to have an abiding hatred for all things fair and noble. When Morgath appears to men, it is usually in some ethereal form, since his true shape is unendurable to mortals. He is never portrayed directly, but is symbolized by the Durangash, a black circle (or orb) on a square field of brown, often surrounded by an irregular black border. Morgath is best known to non-adherants as the master of the undead Gulmorvin.

It is impossible for a mortal to understand the attitudes of the Lord of Chaos. Many of his followers are content simply to fear, respect and appease him; few could be said to love or admire the god. Mortals generally deal with the Lord of Chaos through his semi-divine underlings.

DURAKHAR: THE BLACK POLE

The location of Durakhar, the "Black Pole" is ambiguous, although Yashain is the most likely site. The meaning is plain enough. All evil is said to emanate from the Morgathian hell, to corrupt men's souls and draw them into the endless death. Durakhar is said to be an endless maze of tunnels, populated by the unlamented dead, horrific entities subject to the indifference or torment of Morgath. Most non-adherents believe (hope) that only the worst sinners are sent there; some Morgathians hold that Durankhar is the destination of all mortals.

At Durakhar's dark and musty heart lies Bukrai, the "Orb That Cannot be Viewed", a sphere (?) of black nothingness. Bukrai is said to be a gate to the plane where the First Gods dwell. This chamber, more than any other place, is where Morgath can be found, brooding over Bukrai. Some believe that Bukrai is actually one of the Immutable Ones, but because of its evil emanations and the indifference of the First Gods, most scholars discount this idea.

THE SHADOW OF BUKRAI

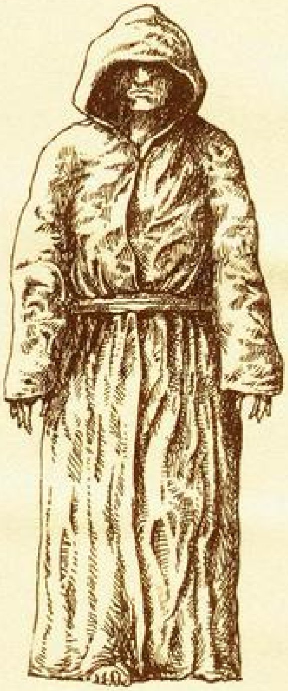
One of the most esoteric phenomonae associated with Morgath and his vassals is the Shadow of Bukrai, a force exuded by some Morgathian entities and artifacts. Whether the Shadow actually emanates from Bukrai, or whether it is a part of Morgath's aura, and therefore a clue to his presence, is a matter of theological debate. All that is really known is that the Shadow of Bukrai sometimes manifests in the presence of the god's minions and holy relics. More is known of the shadow's effects:

> "And the great unease befell us, we felt assailed by the evil within our souls and the vision of the void was terrible to behold... The awesome haze befell us... Bortri fell to his knees and gave voice to screaming moan as I thought no mortal could utter... The undead that we battled loosed an evil laugh and I fled, but I could not escape that vision..."

This quotation is from the journal of Nirlis, a scholar of Meokolis (c.333 TR). He is describing an encounter which he and his companion Bortri had with one of the Gulmorvrin. Bortri was never seen again. Although Nirlis escaped, he continued to have nightmares until his suicide three years later. This is perhaps an extreme case; the Gulmorvrin encountered may have been imbued with more than an ordinary share of the Shadow. Nevertheless, there are more than enough such reports.

KLYSS THE NECROMANCER

The greatest of Morgath's demonic servants is Klyss the Necromancer, Lord of the Gulmorvrin, Befouler of the Dead. Klyss is said to govern Durakhar in his master's absence, although he often walks among mortal men. When he does, he usually takes the form of an emaciated man in black robes; his face is unnaturally pale, but rarely seen past the cowl that keeps it ever in shadow. His hands appear to be withered, almost skeletal. Some attribute him with an odour of decay.



Klyss' purpose in visiting the mortal plane is difficult to determine, but is possibly to recruit souls for the Tormentor. It is said that meeting his eyes directly or feeling his touch will destroy the will of mortals and eventually result in "the fate which no flight escapes". The most commonly told legend regarding Klyss involves a servant who encountered the Necromancer in a marketplace. Telling his master that Klyss had made a threatening gesture at him, the servant begged the loan of a horse and fled for a distant town to escape the Befouler. The master, curiosity overcoming trepidation, went to the market to see the truth of his servant's story. Seeing the figure of the demonic lord, he summoned his courage and asked Klyss why he had threatened his servant. The apocryphal reply was: "I threatened him not. My gesture was surprise at seeing him, for tonight I am to meet him in a far off place."

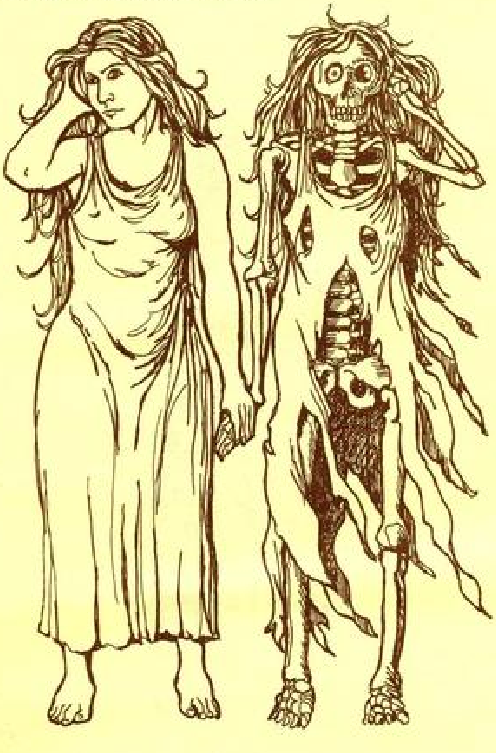
When he is not incognito, Klyss carries Udra, a staff of bone carved with thirteen skulls and thirteen orbs. Udra also bears, in ancient runes, Klyss' oath of fealty to the Dark One. The staff's powers and purposes are obscure.

MYRVRIA THE TEMPTRESS

The lieutenant of Klyss, Myvria appears either as a deathly pale, fascinatingly beautiful woman or as a rotting corpse. Her task is to recruit souls to the ranks of the undead. To achieve this, she bargains with mortals, offering "eternal life" or "the heart's desire" to those who will speak the Unholy Oath:

> To own myne form, when breath hath fled,
> shall I gift myne soul.

When someone utters this line thirteen times at the conclusion of an appropriate ceremony, he has sealed a pact with Morgath.



The Amorvrin (Free Undead)

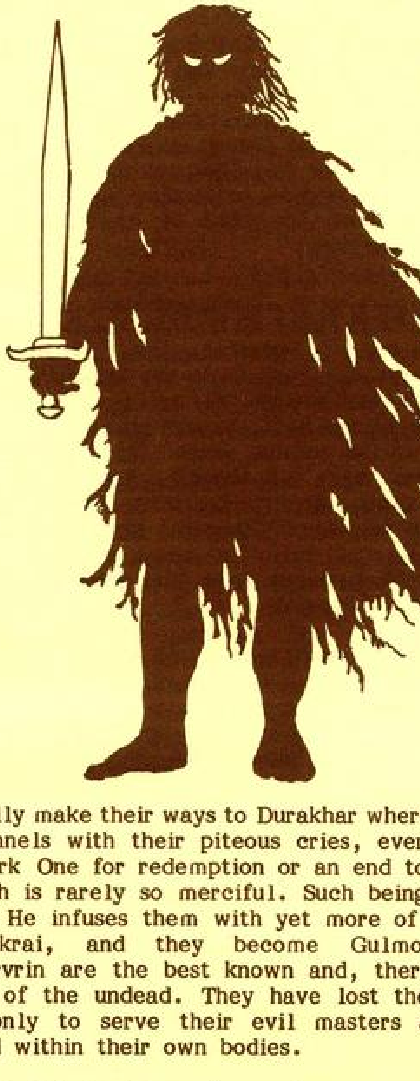
Those who voluntarily join the ranks of Morgath's undead are termed the Amorvrin. When they die their bodies are resurrected by the Shadow of Bukrai. They retain their personalities and intellects and whatever powers they had in life. The Amorvrin are not complete, however. Their soul is taken by Morgath and replaced with a kind of pseudo-aura. They lose the need, but not necessarily the habits, of eating, breathing, and other biological functions. They can be slain, but will be resurrected thirteen times in all. The possibility of a virtually eternal half-life represented by the thirteen incarnations serve as a powerful incentive for worshippers of Morgath to become Amorvrin. After this they lose the power of free will and become one of the Gulmorvrin.

The Amorvrin usually bear the marks of their previous half-lives. Wounds are only minimally repaired with resurrection and the Amorvrin often exude the odours of putrification. Those who serve the interests of the deity particularly well may be granted additional, often sorcerous, powers.

To most, the distinction between Amorvrin and Gulmorvrin is slight or unknown. The church of Morgath deliberately confuses the issue to outsiders.

The Gulmorvrin

When an Amorvrin is slain after its thirteenth resurrection, it is condemned to eternal damnation as one of the Unlamented Dead, who exist only to provide the animus for their forfeited bodies. The Gulmorvrin generally make their ways to Durakhar where they haunt the tunnels with their piteous cries, ever petitioning the Dark One for redemption or an end to being, but Morgath is rarely so merciful. Such beings belong to Klyss. He infuses them with yet more of the Shadow of Bukrai, and they become Gulmorvrin. The Gulmorvrin are the best known and, therefore, most feared of the undead. They have lost their will and exist only to serve their evil masters as prisoners trapped within their own bodies.



If a Gulmorvrin or Amorvrin serves well, it may be granted additional powers, and possibly a "Bukrai Blade", a sword which enhances the Shadow of its weilder.

Involuntary Undead

Not all of the undead have given their souls freely to Morgath. When a mortal who lacks the will to resist is touched by the Shadow of Bukrai, his body may be possessed by the Shadow. All who encounter the Shadow of Bukrai have experiences similar to those of Nirlis (above), but if they have the will to resist they keep their souls and bodies more or less intact. There seem to be three other possible results of exposure to the Shadow:

(1) One may be possessed by the Shadow, a Gulmorvrin enslaved to the will of Morgath. Unless they give up souls voluntarily, such victims may be redeemed, more or less intact.

(2) One may be driven from his body to the lands of the dead or to wander the mortal plane as a shade until his (now undead) body is slain or recovered.

(3) One may yield to the shadow and, in effect, become one of the Amorvrin.

The Shadow of Bukrai seems to be driven by intelligence and serves (some say directs) the ambiguous interests of the Lord of Chaos. Some who should rightly succumb are spared the effects, some who should be spared bacause they willingly serve the god are not. There seems little reason behind the apparent injustice, but as his priests say, "The Tormentor plays a deep game."

Necromancy And The Lesser Undead

The minions of Morgath practice necromancy, the reanimation of corpses, more than the adherents of any other religion. When a corpse is tampered with by necromancy, its former owner will be aware of the process, but is otherwise unaffected and may continue to enjoy his afterlife without concern. Of course, many spirits resent tampering with their mortal remains and some take action. Common necromancy cannot directly affect a departed soul against its will.

The greatest difficulty in common necromancy is the provision of animus. Some Morgathian priests have developed spell-rituals to borrow a small portion of the Shadow of Bukrai; other energies may be summoned by skillful necromancers. The lesser undead have one thing in common. They lack any vestige of their original aura/soul and are, therefore, weaker and "less animate". The amount of energy required to maintain such zombies in the absence of their native souls is prohibitive. Such necromancy is generally practiced for specific purposes and for limited periods. The most common form of necromancy is to gain information. Certain memories remain with the body for a time after death, and these may be brought forth by skillful necromancy. More difficult (and exhausting) rituals/spells can animate a corpse. Such zombies lack self-preservation instincts and will, if properly manipulated, take risks no live creature would consider, but this type of necromancy is tantamount to telekinesis, and can be prohibitively tiring.

RELATIONS WITH THE GODS

Since the establishment of the Concordat of the Illimitable Tome, Morgath has vied with the other gods through intermediaries. Occasionally, however, he takes action that seems to violate the Concordat. This is attributed to his insanity, and is most often ignored or countered in kind by the other gods. This is a dangerous game that may eventually result in the irretreviable destruction of the Concordat, and the return of chaos, which may be Morgath's objective. For now, at least, the other gods seem united in their desire to forestall chaos and their combined power is sufficient to keep the Tormentor in check.

Legend has it that for eons the gods were aware of Bukrai, but never fully understood its nature or dared to gaze within it. When Morgath seized the artifact for himself, Siem, the oldest and wisest of the gods said, "now is heralded the End," and soon departed Kethira for the Blessed Realm. The other gods made no attempt to recover Bukrai. To them, it lay "beyond reason", a thing to be avoided. Only Morgath has studied the orb, and although he has gained some knowledge of its workings, it is said to have driven him mad.

EARLY CHURCH

Around 250 BT, a small group of adventurers entered a tomb (barrow?) complex called Urbrath (?) in the region that is now called Azeryan. The leader of the group was called Lekethan. There were thirteen survivors who would never speak publicly of their underworld experiences and almost nothing is known of the church's beginnings.

It is said that Lekethan and his followers founded a temple, somewhere in the mountains of Azeryan (?). Adherents were recruited slowly and with great care, and over the next few centuries, temples were established (some say by the original thirteen clerics) close to the seats of secular power and gradually attracted a small lay following. The objectives of the Morgathian church remained obscure. Some priests believed that by appeasing the Tormentor they saved Kelestia from the domination of Bukrai, the return of chaos. The secular power of the church was wielded subtly, and with caution.

The idea that the afterlife is the same for all, an eternity of torment by the Lord of Chaos, was central to early Morgathianism. Consequently, the early church believed worship of the Tormentor was to gain relief on the mortal plane; a kind of hedonism. This doctrine could not easily cope with the existence of other deities and theologies and, by the sixth century TR, had lost much of its conviction. Nevertheless, dissent within the church was stamped out mercilessly to avoid the fragmentation and dilution of power experienced by other religions, but this served only to drive dissidents underground, to promote intrigue instead of debate.

The Balshan Heresy

The most successful and dramatic heresy took place in remote Harn. Born to a common soldier of the Corani Empire in the Province of Rethem in 520, Balsha was to become the most important religious personality in that island's history.

Balshanism argued that, the misery of the afterlife could be mitigated by serving Morgath while alive. The fundamental doctrine was that a mortal could exchange his soul and his afterlife for "half life eternal". This concept was later refined as the "little death", the "thirteen lives", or undeath on the mortal plain. Balshanists also proselyzed, bringing their religion into the open for the first time. Balsha's charismatic personality, the accuracy of his prophesies, and a succession of blights and plagues won him a following. The emperor Medak impaled him in 558, an act which fostered a jihad that destroyed the Empire in seven years and led to the founding of the Theocracy of Tekhos in 568. This theocratic dictatorship was abhorrent to the population of Tharda and particularly to the orthodox Morgathian church. Both the Theocracy's subjects and the Lythian church, the latter behind the scenes, worked to bring about its downfall, which was more or less achieved by 588. The central church purged much of the Thardic priesthood and the Harnic arm was brought back into line.

The lesson of the Balshan Jihad was not ignored by the central church. An ecumenical council was convened between 591 and 596. This body produced a revised theology which they called the Thirteen Articles. The Articles combined old dogma with a number of heretical ideas, including Balshanism; an important theme was obedience to the central authority. The Thirteen Articles were proclaimed in 598. Reforms included acceptance of the principle of Thirteen Armorvrin Incarnations. The hopeless despair of the early church was replaced with positive stress on the ideas of immortality through undeath and the rewards of power and wealth in life. The former to be provided by the deity and the latter to be granted by the church. The idea that everyone was to suffer damnation in the afterlife was quietly abandoned. These reforms widened philosophical appeal and were better able to deal with the existence of the other gods.

TEMPLE HIERARCHY

The basic organizational unit of the church of Morgath is the Temple. A temple consists of at least thirteen priests and will usually have a building in which the priests live and hold services. In areas where the church is illegal, there may be no building and the "Temple" will consist of a band of wandering clerics. In either case the following organizational structure will be present.

The Khidarmur (High Priest)

The master of the temple is answerable to the primate and commands the underpriests. He is, theoretically, expert in all matters of dogma and practice, leads important ceremonies and makes temple policy. High Priests are usually appointed by the primate from among the local underpriests, but an outsider may be installed.

The Khalas (Underpriests)

Next in command are the council of twelve temple priests who advise the High Priest. These generally specialize in a particular aspect of the temple's day to day operation, its archives, treasures, training of acolytes, secular politics, and so on. The Khala council is usually a nest of intriging factions. A Khala is appointed by the High Priest. When the High Priest dies, the primate (occasionally) requests the advice of the Khalas before appointing a successor, who will most often be the Khala on best terms with the primate.

The Sungai (Senior Acolytes)

These are acolytes who have been within the temple (usually) for at least two years and have mastered the second circle of Morgathian mysteries. They serve as messengers, lieutenants for the Khalas, and undertake various other duties at the command of their superiors. Sometimes a Sungai is given the freedom to wander, to do work for the church on his own initiative. The nature of this work is understandably varied, but seldom pleasant for bystanders.

The Longai (Acolytes)

The lowest rank of priests are those who have yet to master the second circle, have been training for less than two years, or are disliked by their superiors and, therefore, held back. Their training is rigorous and sometimes deadly. They are required to instantly obey the commands of more senior priests.

CENTRAL AUTHORITY

The church of Morgath has always mercilessly crushed dissent and has been able, with only a few exceptions, to maintain at least the facade, and usually the reality, of unity. The Order of the Lord of Chaos is the only order; all priests belong to it and it may be considered, to all intents and purposes, synonymous with the church.

The Vynkhadur (Pontiff)

The seat of the supreme mortal servant of Morgath is just outside the great city of Meokolis in the Azeryan Empire. It is a large structure which shows only a portion of its size above ground. From Meokolis, the pontiff commands a staff of bureaucrats and servants, through which he communicates with the primates.

The Namana-Khidur (Jury of the Dark Orb)

Resident at Meokolis is an advisory council of twelve anonymous clerics called the "nameless ones" or the "Jury of the Dark Orb". The function of the twelve is obscure to outsiders. It is they who select a new pontiff from among the primates, and their advice is accorded great respect by the pontiff.

The Torkena-Matan (The Holy Office)

The Morgathian pontificate ensures its control of the numerous temples and clerics throughout western Lythia by means of this sinister organization. Created in 596 following the Balshan Heresy, the Holy Office was charged with the exposure and punishment of deviance and "heresy" among the priesthood. Its original purpose was to prevent a successful recurrence of heretical dissidence and to protect and maintain the authority of the central church. Since its foundation it has grown steadily more powerful.

The activities and administration of the Torkena-Matan are deliberately kept mysterious, even to higher ranking clergy. The Morgathian Holy Office is theoretically answerable only to the Jury of the Dark Orb, and the Pontiff himself. In fact it has considerable autonomy, and often conducts independent investigations. Not even primates are immune to the attentions of the Holy Office.

Hidden agents of the Torkena-Matan pervade the temples of Morgath. Most temples will have at least one such agent, and many have two or more, none of whom are known to each other. The knowledge that even the most innocuous comment may be twisted and reported does much to keep dissidents to a minimum. Agents report "impious" or "heretical" behaviour to the Uzhada, the Holy Office's dreaded inquisitors. The arrival of one of these men, all high ranking priests, is often enough to cause panic stricken flight or suicide among the "guilty". Their appearance is designed to intensify the terror of their reputation. They dress entirely in black, including gloves and a featureless cloth mask that leaves only the eyes exposed. Their primary symbol of office is the Adazh, a silver rod carved with skulls.

The inquiries of the Uzhada are either by means of ordeal or by the use of lengthy and tiring interrogation. The burden of proof of innocence is upon the accused. Few are able to establish such innocence and their fate is almost invariably summary and unpleasant death. Judgements of the Uzhada are unappealable. It is common for the Uzhada to promise absolution or lessening of punishment if the accused names co-conspirators. Many do, even inventing names, or naming innocents. The fate of those who co-operate is to be granted a more merciful death or the "privilege" of undeath.

While the Torkena-Matan has traditionally served to remove troublesome or inappropriately ambitious clerics, its terms of reference and power have grown steadily since its creation. Internal disputes that arise in the Morgathian church are "arbitrated" by the Torkena-Matan, a fact which serves to keep the number of such disputes minimal. Additionally, in regions where the church is legal and secular authorities bind criminals over for judgement by the church, it is the Holy Office that "tries" the accused. Few survive the interrogation. The result of these activities is that the Torkena-Matan, and particularly the Uzhada, wield immense power within the church. Few Pontiffs have cared to question or even examine the activities of the Holy Office too critically.

The Gurima (The Thirteen Primates)

The Morgathian church has divided western Lythia into thirteen ecclesiastical provinces. The Gurim (or primate) is answerable directly to the pontiff for his province, within which he has supreme authority. The primate generally resides within one of his primacy's temples. The provinces correspond to secular, national boundaries, but there are exceptions. Harn, for example, is a single province while Azeryan contains more than one.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Not surprisingly, violence and human sacrifice play integral roles in the worship of Morgath. Primarily due to the authoritarian nature of the church, Morgathian rituals have little or no variance with region. Changes in orthodox doctrine and ritual are brutally discouraged.

The Shadryn-Vars

This is the low ritual of the church and is the ceremony of primary interest to the Morgathian laity. Masses are held on the twenty sixth of each month, the night of the new moon. They consist of lengthy, canted prayer and some form of sacrifice, often symbolic. When such sacrifice is real, it is usually provided involuntarily by some unfortunate captive. If such a captive is not available, and blood sacrifice is deemed necessary, an animal is often substituted. The primary purpose of the Shadryn-Vars seems to be to instill the laity with the appropriate sense of awe and terror.

Near the end of each mass, those members of the congregation who so desire approach the altar and pray for "wrath to smite their banes". Before praying, supplicants place some offering on the altar, money being most usual, although anything of value is considered appropriate. The High Priest hears their prayers and after the congregation is dismissed, decides on appropriate action. Since the most common prayers involve difficulties that can be solved by direct physical action (on business competitors, neighbours, enemies, etc.) he will assign acolytes to "answer the prayer". How effectively the prayer is answered is relative to the size and value of the original offering. A major "miracle" might result in the object of the prayer becoming the sacrifice at the next mass. Lesser "miracles" might result in beatings or destruction of property. Those supplicants who have had their prayers answered are required to "testify to the power of Bukrai" at the next mass.

It is unusual for Morgathian laity to be granted private audience with a priest. Generally only very wealthy or powerful adherants are allowed that privilege. Few temples have facilities for private devotions.

The Kenat-Retsa

The Kenat-Retsa is a passage ritual intended to implant the dogma of the church into new members of its congregation. Although the ritual can be taken at any age, it is considered most appropriate if it occurs as close to the individual's thirteenth birthday as possible. Since the church gains many of its adherants from children of its lay followers, this happens more often than not.

Each initiate trains for the Kenat-Retsa thirteen days, preferably in a temple. During this time they are taught rudimentary ritual prayer and dogma, usually by an acolyte, although a substantial donation sometimes improves the rank or skill of the tutor. During this period the initiate is also tested at various times on basic doctrine. Failure usually results in a beating, although it is not unheard of for initiates to be "summoned by the Tormentor".

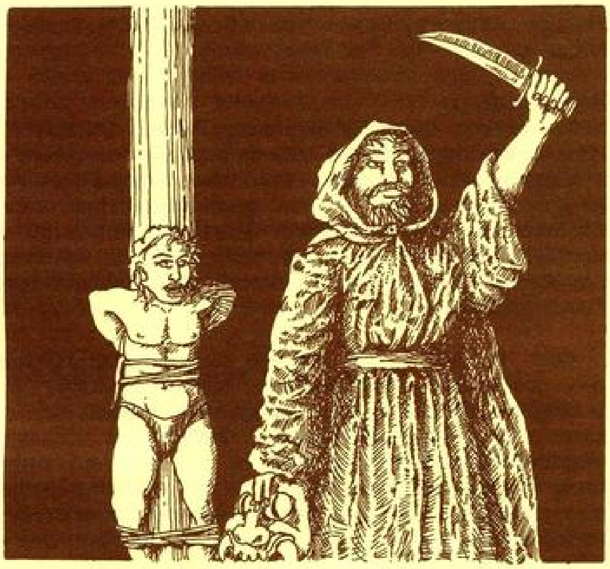
After their training period the new worshipper undergoes the Kenat-Retsa at the beginning of the next mass. This is a short ceremony during which all such persons prostrate themselves before the altar and answer thirteen ritual questions put to them by the officiating priest. Following that they place a clay tablet on which is inscribed their name upon the altar, symbolizing their devotion to Morgath. This done, they are considered "the Wreaker's Flesh" (the phrase commonly used to describe lay worshippers of Morgath) and join the congregation to participate in the mass.

The Degrees Of Nyardath

These are the thirteen ritual ceremonies to which attendence is restricted to the priesthood. Each ritual, or "degree", is more difficult and complex than the last, and priests attend them according to their mastery of ritual. The first twelve degrees are divided into four groups of three, called, from lesser to greater complexity, the Shadath, Huldath, Amaldath, and Varedath. The thirteenth ritual is called Ukrandath and can be performed only by the pontiff (or according to some sources, the semi-divine servants of the diety).

Each of the thirteen degrees involve a summoning of the Shadow of Bukrai, either in the form of one of the undead, or in the higher degrees, some more malevolent incarnation. This is not without its dangers; summoning and controlling even small elements of the Shadow is difficult and exhausting, and "accidents" have been known to happen.

Human sacrifice is common to all thirteen degrees. The means varies from relatively merciful throat cuttings, to sinister ceremonies involving the unholy minions of Morgath. In the highest degrees the sacrifices are unrivalled for their unpleasantness. Human sacrifice is believed to attract the deity's attention and to "feed the Shadow". Morgathian priests have evolved elaborate rituals designed to sap the will of the sacrifice by reducing them to extremes of terror. In many cases the intent seems to be to satisfy the sadism of the priests as much as for theological reasons. In most ceremonies the murder of the victim is preceded by the officiating priest removing his ritual mask, symbolizing that he stands "uncovered before the reality of Bukrai".



The various ceremonies of the Degrees of Nyardath are held on the thirteenth of each month.

Ormauk (The Secret Tongue)

The Morgathian church has developed and conserved a private language. Its origin is unknown, although knowledge is supposed to be granted by the deity. It seems more likely that it is a human invention, created by early priests to guard their secrets. Mastery of Ormauk is associated with knowledge of ritual in such a way that the greater an individual's command of the language, the more proficient he will become at ceremonies.

SYMBOLS AND REGALIA

The number thirteen and the colours brown and black are particularly significant to the church of Morgath. The number results from the belief that the god has thirteen "true" names. This explains why that number is generally viewed as bad luck throughout western Lythia. Uttering any of the names aloud is deemed the greatest folly. The morbidity of the religion is reflected in the ritual dress of its priests; it is almost entirely black and brown. When the clerics are able to wear their full regalia, their ritual dress will include hideous masks, partly to terrify, but mainly to hide their identity. It is customary for Morgathian priests to relinquish their identities. They abandon the use of their birth names in favour of heirarchial or geographical titles, suffixed, when necessary, with an alias.

CALENDAR

The most important celebration of the Morgathian year is the Liturgy of Vabukrai on the thirteenth day of Morgat. This festival is the culmination of twelve days of fasting and ritual sacrifices that begin on the first of the month. The first of Morgat is called the Sacrament of Kobukrai.

GEOGRAPHY

The worship of Morgath is not common in western Lythia, although where the church has any influence at all it tends to be considerable. Since the philosophy of most Morgathian clerics seems to be the acquisition and exercise of merciless power, this can hardly be seen as surprising.

The largest concentration of Morgathian temples is in Azeryan. In many regions such as Trierzon, Emelryne, Melderyn, Kaldor and Kanday, the practice is proscribed and therefore covert. In Karejia worship has declined with the growth of commerce. On Harn, worship is confined to the Thardic Republic and the Kingdom of Rethem.

THE HARNIC CHURCH

There are major Morgathian temples only in Golotha and Coranan, the former being the headquarters of the order and the seat of the primate for Harn. In the city of the Golotha the church has dominated since 562 TR when it fell during the Balshan Jihad. Presently it appoints four of the seven members of the Heptarchial Council, the governing "aldermen" of the city. Outside the walls of Golotha the churches influence is considerably less, although it is widely feared.

THE IVINIAN CHURCH

The church of Morgath is a relative newcomer to the northlands, having established its first major temples within the last century. Although it is not illegal anywhere in Ivinia, it is far from popular, and its temples are weak and require financial assistance from abroad to survive. The temples are located in the towns of Beleka, Fuhreling, and Pelby. The primate for Ivinia is the master of the Fuhreling temple.

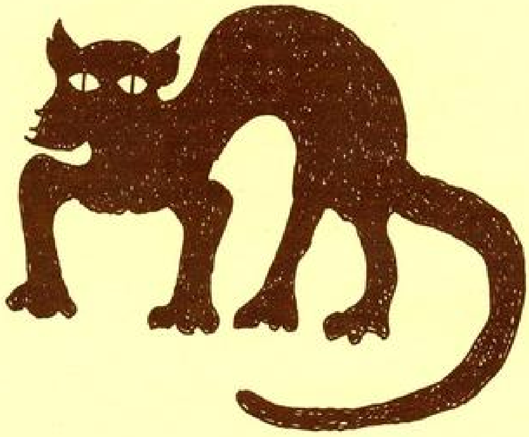
Lord of the Pitch Shadows, Master of Deceit and Evil Dreams, Lord of the Last Illusion, The Merchant of Death, The Unseen Lifter of Lives, Trancer the Cat, Wealth's Worry."

Naveh is probably the most merciless of all the gods. Although some claim that "honour" for Morgath, Naveh seems to be motivated by cold and remorseless intelligence rather than by violent insanity. More than any other, he is the god of darkness, and is often worshipped by thieves and assassins. He is sometimes called the Thief of Heaven, and is deemed a doer of the impossible and a master of lies and deception.

Best known as the bringer of nightmares, Naveh is often called the Lifter of Lives because he is associated with untimely and inexplicable death. The motives of Naveh are impossible for mortals to understand, and sometimes seem contradictory.

DEKEJIS

A demonic servant of Naveh, appearing in the form of a black, red-eyed cat. Dekejis was once the favorite pet of the goddess Halea, but Naveh (who had been spurned by Halea) stole the cat from her, blinding and castrating it, to revenge himself upon her. After the goddess cast Dekejis out, Naveh took the feline in, granting it the red eyes which can perceive heat and see in darkness. He also promised the cat opportunities to devour the eyes and genitals of mortal victims which would eventually restore his own lost organs. Although Dekejis eagerly consumes both delicacies, no evidence of the truth of Naveh's promise exists. Humans who lack, or who are said to lack, one or the other are said to bear the stigmata of Dekejis, or the curse of Naveh.



THE GYTEVSHA

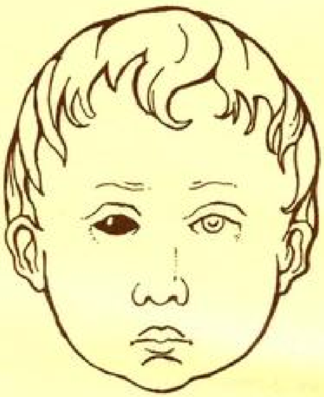
The Gytevesha are the invisible demonic servants and minions of Naveh. It is said that they were not created by the god, but that he found them in the "deepest reaches of the void, of which they are but part". The Gytevsha are at their weakest in daylight hours, and their various powers are most effective at night or in shadow. They are not worshipped, but are treated with the respect befitting their unearthly powers. There are three principle Gytevsha. Each is in turn served by the various minor entities known as the Lesser Gytevsha.

Gekrish

Gekrish is sometimes called "The Hands of Despair". It is he that Naveh most often sends to settle accounts with those who have broken faith with him. It is said that Gekrish dispatches such unfortunates with his talon like hands, reaching inside the body and stilling the heart forever. In the case of those who have most seriously offended Naveh, Gekrish may "possess" the body, dominating and tormenting the resident aura before slaying it.

Krasula

Krasula is the "Hunter of Sleep", the Gytevsha charged by Naveh with delivering horrific nightmares. Krasula is unique among the Gytevsha in that he is able to take visible shape. He commonly appears as a small male child with one eye of palest blue and the other of deepest black.



Vesha

Vesha is "The Mouth of Falsehood", who spreads deceit and confusion among mortals. It is sometimes believed that every lie told by men strengthens Vesha, and that every unpleasant truth that is faced by mortals wounds him.

The Lesser Gytevsha

These are innumerable minor spirits, all of whom serve one of the three principle Gytevsha, or Naveh himself. Each has powers suitable to their task, although most are substantially weaker than the greater Gytevsha. Naveh uses them as messengers, bearers of divine visions, and occasionally to physically intervene on the mortal planes of existence.

KAMIL

Naveh dwells in the bleak city of Kamil, "whose ebon streets are silent, and where Night Eternal reigns". Priests of Naveh believe that a part of Kamil exists both on Kethira and on Yashain. This concurrence is believed to occur at "The Place Most Holy", the semi-legendary site of the foundation of the church, the location of which (if it ever actually existed) has been forgotten.

Besides the deity, Kamil is inhabited by the Gytevsha, and the souls of the most disciplined and devout of Naveh's mortal adherants. These mortal shades exist in a paradise (to a Navehan) of eternal obedience to the god. It is believed that Naveh can gift the most loyal of these with some of the powers of the Gytevsha.

EARLY CHURCH

Naveh has been worshipped in some form for thousands of years. Early worship may have evolved from early man's primeval fear of darkness and death, and it seems likely that the first devotees made sacrifice to placate the horrors of both. The origins of the early church are hard to separate from the body of legend and myth that surrounds the history.

Harsa-Navla (The Place Most Holy)

The traditional history of the organized worship of Naveh is based on writings called the "Revelations of Sinan-khu-Hazar", which are in turn derived from the preachings of a prophet who was active in eastern (?) Lythia during the eighth (?) century BT. Sinan spoke of the of "divine discipline" and the "sacrosanct illusion", concepts which remain with the modern church. He claimed that he had been granted his revelations after a series of oracular dreams led him to seek a citadel (?) "in the shadows of illusion". This edifice was Harsa-Navla, the Place Most Holy. Navehan history is extremely vague regarding Harsa-Navla, perhaps because the Revelations were written at least a century after Sinan's death, or perhaps because it was a concept rather than a physical reality. Whatever the case, it was at the Place Most Holy that Sinan received the visions on which he based his ministry.

According to Sinan, he was shown that eventually the gods would violate their pact and make war upon one another again, changing Kelestia and bringing chaos to the world. Only those who accepted "the discipline of the Lifter of Lives" would survive the cataclysm. The return of chaos, Sinan said, was inevitable, even desireable, for it would rid Kethira of "the brutish and profane" and allow humankind to achieve its full spiritual potential. Those who gave their lives unquestioningly to the Lord of Pitch Shadows and helped "purify mankind" would gain the protection of the god, and that after the chaos had ended (with Naveh triumphant) they would be granted virtual divinity.

> "Shed all fleshly ties, and give wholly unto the Master thy life, for it is His to take at whim. Thy mortality is transient and valueless, save that it be dedicated to the will of He who cleanses and winnows the passing moment."

Sinan travelled widely, expounding his doctrine to any who would listen and performing miracles to substantiate his claim to divine guidance. Since many of these miracles involved the sudden death of persons who mocked him, or sought to do him injury, he quickly gained considerable awed respect and a small cadre of followers.

The Fifteen Prophets

After several years of proselytizing, Sinan led his followers back to Harsa-Navla. There they were granted visions similar to those that Sinan had described and each was tested. The manner and purpose of these tests is not stated in the Revelations, although it is clear that they were harsh; many of Sinan's followers were found wanting in some way and perished.

Those that survived fell into two groups. The most devout, fifteen in number, were gifted with various skills and powers. To them was given the task of establishing the church. The remainder were to assist the fifteen prophets, and do their bidding as though it were the will of Naveh himself. They were sent from Harsa-Navla, "even to the uttermost reaches of Kethira", to prepare for the cataclysmic strife that would eventually come. Sinan, his task accomplished, was ritually murdered by the fifteen prophets.

The movements of the prophets can only be surmised after their departure from Harsa-Navla, although it is clear that at least three, and possibly as many as eight groups (or their successors) reached western Lythia. There is evidence that one prophet, Taurin Halfhand, arrived on Harn during the latter stages of the Atani Wars and took part in the Battle of Sorrows that ended Sindarin rule of the island.

The early prophets and their successors acted with such great subtlety that there are almost no references to the church in secular histories until the first century TR. They established covert temples, and made no attempt to proselytize. The church of Naveh has never had any interest in its small number of lay adherants, and scornfully regards them as little better than the bulk of "impure humanity". The early priests began the practice of kidnapping children to raise as acolytes. Children, they believed, were untainted by the "false teachings of the profane", and were more easily trained to the harsh discipline of the church.

ORGANIZATION

The individual, self-sufficient temple is central to the Navehan church. Most temples are located in urban areas, and generally acquire most supplies by theft, or where the church is legal, in tribute. Navehan temples are always covert, even where lawful. Consequently, most outsiders regard the church with speculative and misinformed (if understandable) dread.

The internal discipline of the Navehan church is the subject of legendary awe; high priests have been known to order underlings to commit ritual suicide for no apparent reason. The best known tale concerns a master who ordered a favourite to slit his throat as a demonstration of loyalty to a guest.

TEMPLE HIERARCHY

The responsibilities of the priests within Navehan temples is virtually identical throughout western Lythia. Advancement is usually by killing the incumbent office holder. A formal challenge to mortal combat or a stealthy murder are considered equally appropriate. A successful killing is deemed evidence of Naveh's approval of the murderer for master rank. Vacancies that occur as the result of a master's natural death or suicide are filled by appointment, or in the case of the high priest, by election of the other masters.

Garana (High Priest)

The Garana is the absolute master of his temple. His word is law and there is no appeal of his decisions. He sets temple policy and presides at all important temple rituals.

Arasha (Chief Deacon)

The chief deacon is the Garana's deputy and governs in his absence. He is also responsible for the instruction of the senior acolytes (deacons) and assigns their duties.

Wolren (Master of Archives and Treasure)

The Wolren has in his keeping all monies, relics, and written works owned by the temple.

Tarava (Master of Discipline)

The Tarava is responsible for administering the strict code of discipline, and punishing disobedience or failure. Most of the acolytes act as his informers. Punishments vary, depending on the nature of the offence; all are painful, many are fatal.

Prada (Master of Acolytes)

The master responsible for the training of junior acolytes, as well as the temple's day to day functions.

Dezena (Master of Ritual)

The Dezena has various ceremonial functions and is also responsible for teaching the mysteries and doctrine of the church.

Adranatha (Junior Acolytes)

Navehan temples "recruit" either by kidnapping infants or, less often, by female clerics deliberately conceiving. In either case, the child is raised within the temple and taught Navehan doctrine and basic ritual. On its eleventh birthday the child is declared Adranatha, and training intensifies. Junior acolytes perform all menial tasks in the temple.

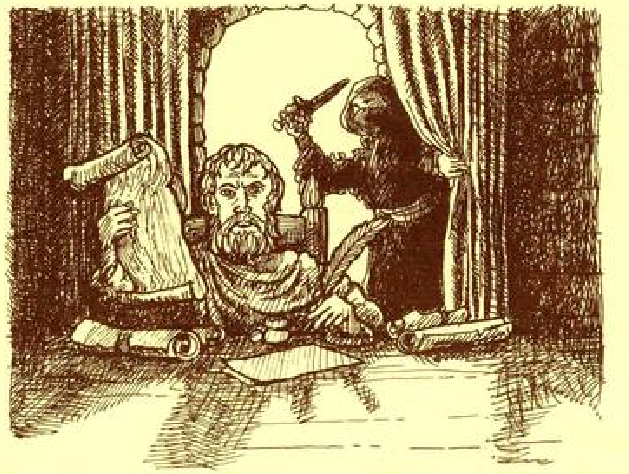
Dranatha (Senior Acolytes)

When a junior acolyte satisfies the master of acolytes that he is ready, he is allowed to undertake the ritual of passage to become Dranatha. This grim ceremony requires that two junior acolytes stalk one another in the temple maze. The acolyte who wounds or kills the other, without himself being injured, is declared Dranatha. A loser who survives remains in the ranks of the Adranatha. If both are wounded, neither advances. Acolytes may attempt the ritual twice. A second failure necessitates ritual suicide.

Dranatha are often called deacons, and are the approximate equivalent of priests in other churches. They have various duties, including guard and administrative functions. Some serve as personal assistants to temple masters.

Navas-Kara (Temple Assassin)

This is a honorary title rather than an official rank. When appended to a cleric's name it signifies that he has undertaken at least one successful murder of an outsider. Such killings are either to further the doctrinal or political ends of the church, or are commissioned by external sources. The approach for such services is usually through contacts in the Lia-Kavair, the "Thieves' Guild", of western Lythia, which pays tribute to the church in most regions. Fees are exhorbitant and the Church is prone to refuse contracts without explanation.



The church sometimes attempts to place assassins among the households of secular lords; preparation for the day that Naveh requires that death. The patience of these hidden assassins is legendary. One apocryphal story tells of an encounter between a Navehan envoy and a noble who intended to stamp out the church within his jurisdiction. The envoy said his message was to be delivered only in private. The lord, understandably cautious, had the Navehan searched before dismissing his courtiers, having only his guards remain. The envoy reminded him that the message was for his ears alone, and the lord dismissed all but four guards. He demanded to hear the message, telling the Navehan that the remaining guards were staying, since they were as trusted as if they were his own sons. Thereupon the messenger turned to the guards, and asked "Were I to order you to slay this lord, would you?". As one man the four drew their daggers, saying "Command us as you wish." The envoy, having presumably delivered his message, left with the four guards, and the lord rethought his plans.

THE CENTRAL AUTHORITY

Whether or not there is a true central authority of the church of Naveh is open to dispute. All priests recognize the same, semi-mythical, supreme leader, the Kuglanu-nas-Harsa-Navla (Oracle of Harsa-Navla) but whether this entity exists in the mortal world is uncertain. Since the first century TR the temple of Manquideh in Dalkesh (south of Karejia) has assumed many of the usual functions of a pontifical seat.

Nagara (Pontiff)

The Nagara dwells in Maniquideh, where the church of Naveh has considerable, although subtle, influence over the secular authorities. Navehans acknowledge that he has a special relationship with the god, although they do not recognize that he is the supreme leader of the church. One of the Nagara's titles is "The Hands of the Kuglanu" indicative of the belief in a higher mortal (?) authority. The Nagara is always selected from the clerics of the Maniquideh temple. The choice of successors is invariably by murder.

Be'ara-Tulna (Holy Office)

This organization functions as messengers and inquisitors of the church. It is made up of the most fanatical priests of the church and are in theory answerable only to Naveh for their actions. Generally, they travel at will, seeking disobedient "heretics". It seems likely that some of the most skilled assassins in western Lythia are members of the Be'ara Tulna. They wear no badge of office.

THE REGIONAL AUTHORITY

Shuganal (Primate)

The church of Naveh has divided western Lythia into several ecclesiastical provinces. Few of these seem to correspond with secular, national boundaries, although in a few cases an obvious geographical obstacle delineates the primacy. This is the case in both Harn and in Ivinia. The Shuganal's power is primarily advisory, interpreting the edicts of the pontiff, and setting regional policies.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

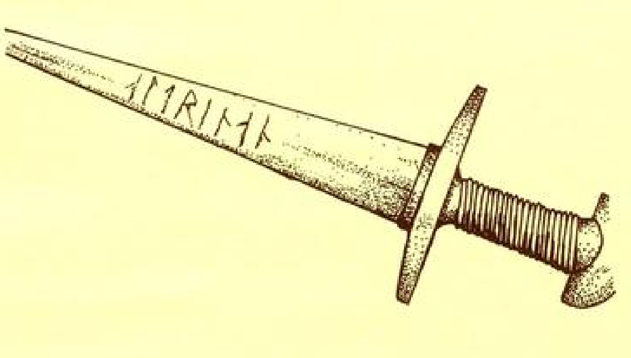
Ritual murder and suicide play major roles in the worship of Naveh. Such deaths are believed to serve the god, either by providing him with another loyal servant, or by moving another step towards inevitable "chaos and triumph". In addition, various pyrotechnic, optical, and mechanical trickery is involved in worship. Almost all priests are aware that the "miracles" that occur during ceremonies are caused by the master of ritual and his assistants, they believe the deity is the true motive force behind the effects.

Navehan ritual has always involved drug induced trances. Priests ingest various hallucinogenic or stimulant drugs before and during ceremonies.

The Navehan church holds no formal ceremonies for its few lay adherants. Such persons generally worship privately in whatever manner they deem appropriate and pay tribute to the church. It is unusual for them to recieve even the most rudimentary religious instruction.

Dezenaka

This is the most important monthly ritual of the Navehan church. Held on the night of the new moon, most clerics prepare for it by ingesting quantities of Alanal, a powerful hallucinogen, producing euphoria, illusions and susceptibility to suggestion. Dezenaka rituals includes various "miracles" and at least one blood sacrifice. This is provided either by an aging cleric who "longs for the sable streets of Kamil" and commits ritual suicide, or some hapless victim captured for the purpose. In either case, simple bloodletting is not enough; a degree of "artistry" must be involved for the sacrifice to be holy to Naveh. Dezenaka rituals end with a ceremonial feast in which the blood of the sacrifice is mixed with wine and consumed by the attending priests. This is believed to reinforce the clerics' sense of sacred mission.



Occasionally Dezenaka rituals include a ceremony by which one cleric is selected to murder a chosen victim. The victim is determined by the chosen cleric touching one of several daggers held by the high priest. Each blade has engraved upon it the name of its intended victim and can be used for no other purpose but his death. The killing must take place within the month. Victims range from the lowliest beggar to the most powerful of lords; the choice is believed to be determined by Naveh and is said to further the patient aims of the god. It is at Dezenaka rituals that the selection of children to be kidnapped is made. This choice is made by decree of the high priest.

The Herth-Akan

A punishment ritual of the temple of Naveh. A miscreant cleric is given a one hour head start and for three successive days and nights thereafter must evade the murderous pursuit of seven of his temple brothers. The ritual is occasionally used against enemies of the temple, or against those that the temple has contracted to kill. If the victim evades death for the required period, he is permitted to live, but the failed brothers will undertake ceremonial suicide. Persons who survive the Herth-Akan are highly respected.

The Night Of Shadows

The most important day of the Navehan year, the Night of Shadows occurs on the thirtieth of Navek. It is said that on this night Naveh and his minions are at their most powerful, and that "the gods bow to the Thief of Heaven". Ceremonies are similar to those of the Dezenaka, save that at least three murder victims are selected. These must be slain before midnight of the following day. This day, first of Morgat is called Shadowmath, and is deemed the day during which Naveh walks fearlessly in daylight. In areas where the church is very active this period is one of great apprehension for the general populace.

SYMBOLS AND REGALIA

Clerical robes are loose fitting, to allow freedom of movement, and are usually black in colour. Ranking clergy wear an over-robe of scarlet. All priests carry daggers. A temple assassin wears a broad belt of white cloth which will be red with the victim's blood when returned to the temple. During ceremonies masters don the dreaded skull-mask denoting imminent death. Other symbols are representations of Dekejis, Shinkra-akra, the translucent skull, and Nava-shak-ara, the god's ebony knife.

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Temples of Naveh are located throughout western Lythia, although the church is illegal in almost all regions. At best it is officially illegal, but tolerated and given wide leeway in its activities. It is legal only in a few very small regions, Maniquideh, the seat of the pontiff, being one such. The largest concentration of temples is in Azeryan, although the church is also powerful in Karejia, Dalkesh and Hepekeria.

THE HARNIC CHURCH

The church seems to have been present on Harn for well over a thousand years. The chief temple and the seat of the primate for Harn is in Coranan; there are also temples hidden in Golotha, Shiran and Tashal. Since 664 a group of heretical clerics have operated a temple in the wilderness near the ruins of Bejist.

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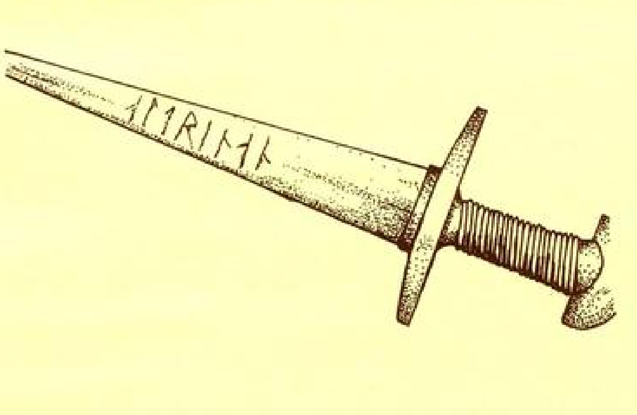

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The Restorer, Bringer of the Life Renewed, Maker of Balms, Lady of Truth, the Everliving Daughter of White Virtue, Guardian of the Meek, Lady of Industrious Labours and the Ripe Harvest, Confidant of Lovers"

Peoni is the kindest and most gentle of the gods. She will accept any with an honest heart into her fold. She loves the scholarly who use their knowledge in service to others, the poor, the meek, the innocent and the powerless, the hard working and those who love with true love. She is the patron goddess of healing and agriculture, and is closely associated with the turning of the seasons. She demands that her followers be gentle and kind, but is forgiving of those who transgress.

Peoni is most often represented as a young girl with hands worn red from her labours, and is symbolized by spring flowers or by the fruits of agriculture. It is said that she prefers white flowers and that the daisy is her favourite. Often she is given the aspect of the earth mother, a nursing mother of indeterminate age, or a woman about to nurture a variety of creatures.

THE PEONIAN FAMILY

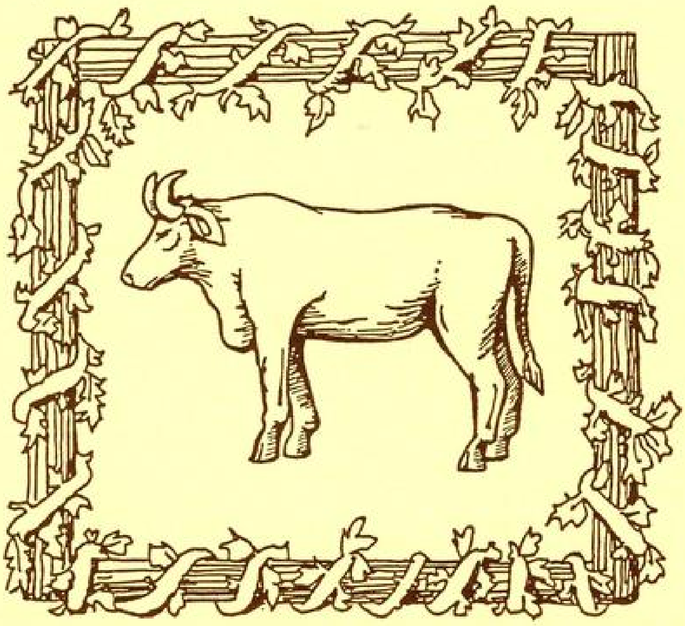
Peoni has several semi-divine servants who aid her, or intercede on behalf of her adherants. The four following often have shrines dedicated to them.

Belsirasin (The Weeper)

Belsirasin is often portrayed as a weeping young warrior, without weapons. He is said to shed tears for every lie or deceit told by mortal man. Belsirasin is the lord of virtue and truth, perhaps the sternest and least forgiving of Peoni's servants.

Maermal (Lord of Labour)

Maermal is the lord of honest labour and diligent effort. He is usually portrayed as a massive bronze ox of great tenacity, one who will labour, often without thought of reward, out of duty to family. When his work is disturbed or wrecked he starts again without anger. His is the patience of the earth; he is symbolic of the ability of common folk to triumph in their simple day to day endeavours.

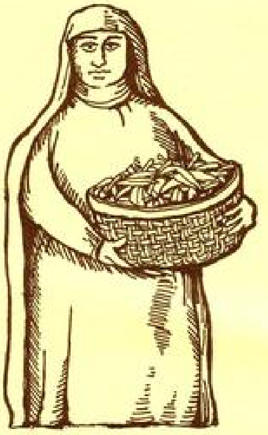


Tirrala (Handmaiden of Renewal)

Tirrala is also called the Foremost of Healers. She is the patron of physicians, many of whom maintain icons or household shrines in her honour. She usually appears as a slim young woman with tired, drawn features. In her right hand she bears a surgeon's knife and in her left she carries a small urn. These are the symbols of the guild of Physicians and can be found displayed outside the premises of many of its members.

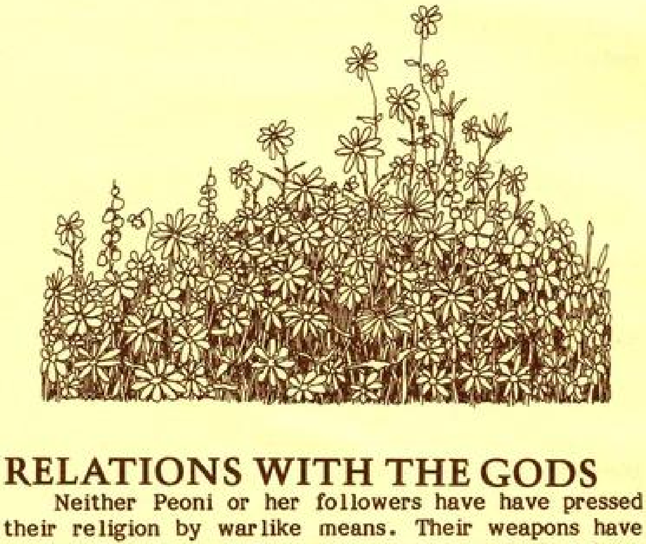
Yselde (The Trothmaker)

Yselde is the mistress of honourable love, particularly between persons of simple birth. She smoothes the difficulties that lovers may marry, and those whose love is unrequited often visit her shrines seeking guidance. Newlyweds pray to her for the blessing of children. She is commonly portrayed as a heavy set woman of middle years, usually carrying a basket, or sometimes as a kindly crone or suckling babe. She is very good humoured.



THE MEADOWS OF VALON

Peoni dwells in the enchanted meadows of Valon where it is forever spring. Valon is an impossibly verdant field of flowers, rich in delicious nectar, able to regenerate themselves overnight. This is the heaven of Peoni's worshippers. Here, in humble but pleasant cottages dwell those who have laboured hard in life. The common belief is that Valon is on Yashain.



RELATIONS WITH THE GODS

Neither Peoni or her followers have have pressed their religion by warlike means. Their weapons have always been persuasion and example, and they have sought to convert the defenseless, those who are often ignored by other religions. Peoni and her divine servants have never taken violent action against other deities; they followed the Concordat of the Illimitible Tome even before it was signed. Peoni does not struggle with the other gods for dominion over Kelestia.

It is often held that Peoni is Larani's mother, in spirit if not in fact. Larani's followers are the staunch protectors of Peoni's church. Laranian warriors often guard Peonian temples, but this is only one aspect of the working affiliation of the two churches.

EARLY CHURCH

Earth and fertility cults have been common among the human tribes of Lythia for as long as men have farmed and kept livestock. The concept of maternal soil evolved with the growth of agriculture. Modern theologians believe that these early cults had Peoni as their common object, regardless of the name by which they called her. As peoples refined their agricultural practices, worship of Peoni became more organized, combining many of the early cults with more sophisticated concepts.

Unification Of The Aspects

It is, perhaps, in the nature of Peonians to seek the common ground with others. Hence, the unification of the church was to be a bloodless marriage; Peonians tended to celebrate the discovery of a new aspect of their goddess, rather than fight over the rightness of views. Even before the unification of the church, those who worshipped the aspects of Peoni were friendly toward each other.

The Aerlathos

The first visitation of the Aerlathos occured circa 600 BT. The Aerlathos were four prophets, one from the north, one from the south, east and west. Two were men, two women. Each claimed to have been gifted with the same vision, that, "who worship the cycles of earth shall be as one".

At this time, many of the earth cults had fallen from the true ways by introducing elements of violence and retribution into their rituals. Some had even introduced human or animal sacrifice into their rites, offering blood to enrich their soil. Ceremonies often devolved into orgiastic revels. Hence, according to tradition, the Aerlathos were summoned by Peoni to codify the beliefs and renew the purity of her followers.

The four preached eloquently, appealing to the common man, and made their separate ways over several years to the heart of western Lythia. Everywhere they went the crops were blessed. Word spread of their pilgrimage and Peonians celebrated their newfound unity. By the time the four simultaneously reached the tiny village of Perna, there were several thousand (?) clerics in their train to witness the ceremony of renewal. The four, who had never met, spoke in perfect unison of the need to reconsecrate the priesthood to the principles of the Lady of Labours. Then they blessed the priests before them, one of whom they chose to preside over their double wedding, which was symbolic of the innocent unity of the church. At this point, according to tradition, the Aerlathos were transported to Valon, but not before they promised three more visitations that would occur, "when the terror of war shall beset thee and the congregations shall as babes put aside their faith for bright trinkets".

The one they chose to marry them was named Alamarel, a pious and humble woman. To her fell the task of continuing the work of the Aerlathos. The marriage was seen as symbolic of the great task she now undertook. The clerics assembled in Perna built a temple to the glory of Peoni. A few stayed and would form the nucleus of the central bureaucracy, but most were sent home to finish the work of unification.

Settlement And Common Dogma

Before the Aerlathos, word of Peoni was spread by mendicant clerics dependent on the charity of simple farmers. They built no temples, preaching oneness with the earth and the purity of virtue. The first pontiff, Alamarel, encouraged the proliferation of temples to be supported by the voluntary tithes of the laity. Their purpose was to provide a sanctuary for the purification and education of priests.

Perhaps the most important element in post-unification doctrine was the principle of automatic forgiveness, something virtually unique to the church of Peoni. The idea that any sin, no matter how heinous, could be mended through confession by the simple act of sincere contrition set the church apart from other religions, most of which tend to exact severe retribution. Another unusual element was the fallibility of the priesthood. Peoni's clerics were accorded respect, but it was recognized that they were human beings, and as such would necessarily sin. Even the pontiff, while possessed of special wisdom, was fallible. The purpose of the church was to help the individual commune with his conscience, a manifestation of Peoni's will that all men possessed. If Peoni exists in some measure within all beings, then all life is sacred and is capable of finding its true place in the scheme of things.

Priests of the early church are remembered for their saintly patience and superhuman energy in the face of persecution by other religions. Many were martyred by those who rejected their doctrine. The story of Safransi of the Sheaf, who was boiled alive by Agrikan fanatics rather than renounce her beliefs, is an oft told story. Safransi continued to bless her murderers until the moment of her death. This kind of sacrifice earned respect for the church from all quarters. When non-adherents came to realize that Peonians were harmless, were willing to aid almost anyone with their healing arts, and were not in competition with other dogmas, the church was left in peace and was able to spread with little interference. Peonian evangelists directed their main efforts at those unwanted by other faiths. Peoni's adherants were farmers and other poor folk. Even in regions that were heavily dominated by more aggressive and violent religions the church prospered. The gentleness of Peonian theology and the belief that all sins can be forgiven made it attractive to those forsaken by the other gods. Persecution continued here and there, but their willingness to forgive and their lack of resistence meant that Peonians were unchallenging enemies.

THE SAINTS

No church honours its martyrs more than the Peonians. Hundreds of shrines and temples are built to commemorate the acts of the pious. Many mark their graves, the sites of their births or deaths or the places where they performed the acts that made them saints.

The role of the Peonian saint is varied. Their lives are examples of behaviour. Their stories are used as parables of virtue, but they are not divine, merely mortal men and women who transcended their sinful natures and earned their honoured places in the fields of Valon. Peonian saints have several things in common. They all performed some act(s) of sacrifice to benefit the deity, the church or their fellow man. They were motivated by the desire to do right for its own sake, never for any reward in the mortal plane or the afterlife.

The Prophet Harbraen
The prophet Harbraen founded a mission to the barbarians of Shorkyne in c. 425 BT and taught those nomadic tribesmen the benefits of farming. After performing several miracles, including the raising a child from the dead, Harbraen recruited several followers from the tribesmen and from more civilized parts of Lythia; these disciples spread his gentle message widely throughout the region.

This sudden success came to the attention of a fanatic wandering band of Agrikan priests led by one Gusryl. History sometimes appends the sobriquet "Cannibal" to Gursryl's name; whether or not that is justified, it is clear that he was a man driven by irrational hatreds and a religious fervour that even by Agrikan standards could be described as malevolent and twisted.

Probably due to his fanaticism, Gusryl had had little success at winning converts in the district and plotted to make an example of the prophet. The Agrikans siezed Harbraen from his tiny temple and carried him into the wilderness. There, Harbraen suffered hideous tortures for eight days before being allowed to die. Gusryl deposited Harbraen's mutilated corpse in the centre of his village, proclaiming the "Triumph of the Reaper" and preaching his brutal doctrine to the horrified villagers while standing beside the body. As Gusryl spoke, lush grass grew from the packed earth. This miraculous growth spurred the wrath of Harbraen's flock who attacked Gusryl and his band, driving them from the village.

The grass grew quickly. By the next morning, it had covered Harbraen's body and a square sixteen feet across. Some who subsequently lay upon the grass were healed of illnesses or otherwise blessed. These events resulted in the village of Harbraen becoming the destination of pilgrims seeking the benefices of "Harbraen's Plot". As the number of pilgrims increased, so did the number of resident priests. Eshaela, who had been foremost among Harbraen's disciples, began building a temple fronting Harbraen's Plot, funding the construction with the generous donations of pilgrims. The village of Harbraen has since grown into a city, the seat of the Peonian Primate of Shorkyne.

ORGANIZATION

The Peonian church has never been particularly complex. This is in part a function of the disintrest of most clerics in temporal or internal politics as well as an extension of the "simple life" philosopy of the church. The backbone of the church is its scattered, semi-autonomous temples which are found throughout Lythia. The main function of the temple is as a home base and coordinating centre for the efforts of individual priests.

TEMPLE HIERARCHY

The responsibilities of the priests within a temple vary slightly between the orders, and from one temple to another depending on local resources, but an idealized model can be presented.

The Pelnala (High Priest/Priestess)
The Pelnala is the master or mistress of the temple, making general policy. Most function as the chairman of a council of the other significant clerics. The Pelnala is often in close contact with any nearby temples of Larani, and deals with them regarding cooperation or assistance. In addition to these administrative duties, the Pelnala performs most of the important temple rituals.

The Solana (Master of Acolytes)
The master reponsible for the training of acolytes and assigning their labours. Since most work in Peonian temples is done by apprentice clerics the Solana tends to be responsible for the efficient running of the temple. In many temples the Master of Acolytes also deals with itinerant clerics who seek accomodation for short periods.

The Avasana (Master of Archives and Treasures)
The master responsible for the temple records, sacred relics, special artifacts and such wealth as the temple may possess. Since the Peonian practice of distributing monies to the poor results causes many temples to verge on bankruptcy, the monetary resources administered by the Avasana are often small.

The Lerovana (Master of Healing)
The Lerovana is an office present in nearly all Peonian temples although their role varies depending upon the the facilities available. In those temples which do not maintain a hospital on the grounds the Lerovana fills the role of chief physician, ministering to any who need aid. Where a temple maintains a hospital, the Lerovana is in charge of its administration.

The Ebasethe (Temple priests/priestesses)
The number of Ebasethe varies greatly from temple to temple. Ebasethe are not generally assigned to specific masters, although it is not uncommon for the Pelnala, the Avasana, or the Lerovana to be assisted by an Ebasethe on a semi-permanent basis. Generally, Ebasethe serve where they are needed, gardening, aiding the sick, dispensing alms, hearing confession, giving council, copying manuscripts, and so on.

Ebasethe are expected to adhere to a strict moral code. While it is true that Peoni is swift to forgive, she is less tolerant of improper behaviour among her clergy. To resist the temptations of mortal man, many Ebasethe lead ascetic lives; all are celibate and take a vow of poverty, many are vegetarians. Resistance of temptation and self denial are common elements in the behaviour of Ebasethe.

It should be noted that Peonian clerics do not take undue pride in their morality, nor are they prone to the more extreme forms of self denial practiced by fanatics of some religions. It is sometimes said that: "The way of man is the way of weakness and of falling into temptation. Belittle not those who succumb, for it is proof only of their humanity. And be not prideful of thy virtue, for that is among the most perilous of the sins that trouble mortal man."

The Esolani (Acolytes)

Esolani usually join the church somewhere between the ages of fourteen and twenty, although this is by no means a firm rule. Persons have been known to hear the call late in life, sometimes after leading riotous, violent, or otherwise impious lives. It is sometimes said that "The Maker of Balms forgives all, and loves those best who have been deep in excess, yet have struggled free."

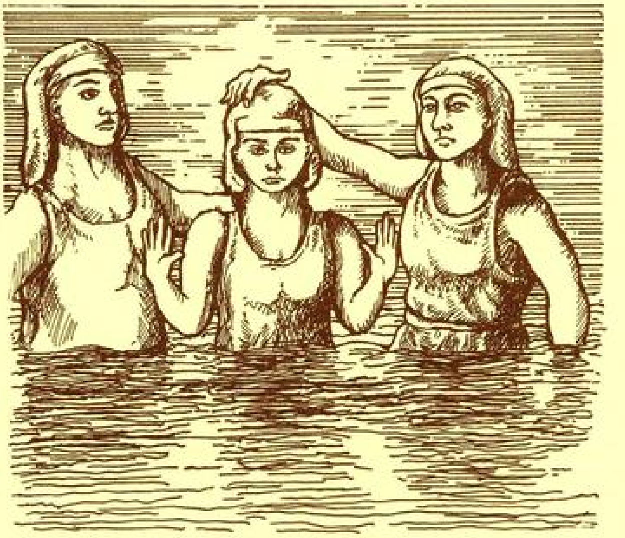
Regardless of age, Esolani spend their first few years in the temple labouring at the hundreds of menial tasks required of them. This labour symbolizes the "purification and dedication" of their souls to the goddess and is intended to foster a proper degree of humility. Esolani are instructed in the doctrine of the church. The Avasana is responsible for this training although it is common for the Ebasethe to conduct the actual instruction. The judgement of when an Esolani has spiritually progressed enough to become Ebasethe is left to the High Priest(ess). The ritual of "graduation" involves fasting and a lengthy solitary vigil before the altar. Many Esolani never become priests, remaining acolytes all their lives. This is not deemed shameful, indeed it is not unheard of for repentant lay sinners to become Esolani as an act of penance, either for a fixed period or for the rest of their lives.

It is not necessary for Esolani to follow the strict moral code required of Ebasethe. On the other hand, they are not expected to be wenching, roistering, drunkards either. While celibacy and denial is not essential to Esolani, there is no denying that it often speeds the progress of Esolani to Ebasethe. Many Esolani have no intention of becoming proper priests; they are members of the laity accepted for the purpose of reaffirming their dedications to the goddess.

Reslava (Mendicant)

Reslava are Ebasethe who are not bound to particular temples, with licence to travel widely in the outside world. Reslava carry alms bowls and are largely dependant upon the charity of outsiders. They use donations to feed themselves and to distribute to the poor, not necessarily in that order. Most wander from village to village. Even in the most lawless parts of Lythia, only the most depraved and consciousless person would seek to rob, harm, or slay a Reslava.

Any pious Peonian may become a Reslava simply by passing the "Reslava-kai Peledaur", the Ritual of the Passage of Humble Souls. This test may be requested by anyone of the Pelnala of a temple and is administered by a specially appointed group of four Ebasethe. For four days the candidate performs the most menial tasks available while fasting and maintaining a vow of silence. At the end of this period, the four Ebasethe ritually bathe him and give him four sips of holy water, consumed while facing first east, then south, then west then north. In these attitudes the candidate utters the Praises of the Seasons, spring, summer, autumn and winter respectively. After a four hour vigil, the candidate's knowledge of the mysteries is tested; he must demonstrate mastery of at least the Third Circle. After this, the candidate presents the panel of Ebasethe with his original Labour of Reverence, usually a prayer, a hymn or some other work of art or learning dedicated to the glory of Peoni. The group of four examine the work and if it is not adequate, they may advise the candidate as to how it could be improved. If the Labour of Reverence is judged adequate, the final part of the Ritual of Passage takes place before the assembled priests; the work is performed again and the Pelnala bestows the Reslava'Anama, an amulet in the form of a silver tetrahedron. The entire company embraces the successful Reslava, many gift him with useful articles, and he exits the temple through the Reslavannon, the "Portal of Mendicants".



THE CENTRAL AUTHORITY

The early church had no central authority. The hundreds of wandering disciples recognized no authority between the diety and themselves. It was with the founding of the temple of Perna, and the selection of the first pontiff, Alamarel, that a central body came into being, according to tradition, in 594 BT. The Ecumenical Council of Perna in 293 TR created the Peonian Hapalanate and established the current structure of the church.

The Hapalan (Pontiff)

The Peonian Pontiff dwells in Perna, which is still the most popular destination of Peonian pilgrims. Historically, Hapalans have not attempted to become secular lords, although their influence in Perna is great. The office of Hapalan alternates between male and female clerics; as of 720 the Hapalan is Vialle of Aradil, a saintly and intelligent woman of fifty four. She became Hapalan in 709. Neither she, nor her predecessors have claimed to be infallible; their role is that of a spiritual guide. To facilitate this role, the Hapalan is relieved of virtually all administrative tasks by the Pelclunia. The moral pronouncements of the pontiff are accorded great respect by adherents and are usually obeyed voluntarily.

The Pelclunia (Cardinals)

The sixteen members of the Pelclunia serve as advisors to the Hapalan. Each represents a distinct geographical region and is appointed by the Hapalan in consultation with the appropriate primate. When the Hapalan dies the Pelclunia chooses a successor. In this they are said to be guided by Peoni herself and may select anyone, excepting only themselves. Usually, they have selected a primate or other highly advanced cleric. Such is not always the case however. In 602, for example, the Pelclunia chose Derinea of Shulde, a Reslava from Melderyn. The choices of the Pelclunia always seem suitable in retrospect; Halpalans have been, almost without exception, competent and devout servants of Peoni.

THE REGIONAL AUTHORITY

The church of Peoni divides the known world into ecclesiastical provinces for administrative purposes, the most important of which is the handling of relief monies. The borders of many of these provinces coincide with the political boundaries of secular nations.

The largest type of province is called a primacy; this is roughly equivalent to a secular kingdom, although some primacies (Harn for example) contain several states.

Mepeleh (Primate)

Mepeleh are appointed by the Pontiff (or Pelclunia) and are responsible for the administration of the church in a substantial region. Mepeleh's appoint bishops in consultation with the Pelclunia.

Sulaplyn (Bishop)

The governor of an ecclesiastical "fief" containing several temples. The office of Sulaplyn is essentially administrative, but does involve some theological interpretation. Sulaplyn rank between the Mepeleh and the High Priest. Sulaplyn usually appoint the latter within their regions.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

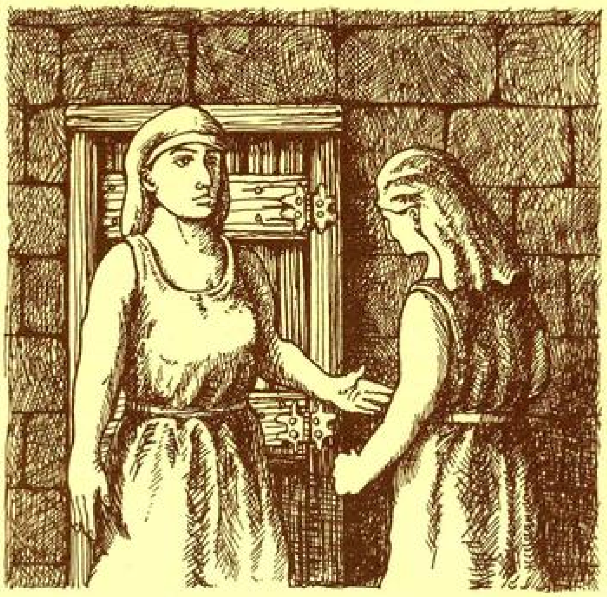
Prayer, meditation and song are common features of worship and fasting is often practiced. Sacrifice of agricultural produce is common at harvest time. Many Peonians donate part of their income to the church to support its charitable activities. If a district is prosperous and there is little need for the dispensing of alms, temples forward contributions to the regional or central authorities for use, when needed, in needy regions. Hence, despite its self-denying policies, the church often has a sizable cash reserve in some regions and at Perna.

Forms of worship can be divided into the Greater and Lesser Sapeleh (high and low rites). The Lesser Sapeleh can be attended by any adherant of Peoni, and participation in Greater Sapeleh is restricted to priests and acolytes.

Lesser Sapeleh

These are lay services and include such events as the communal blessing of the planting or harvest, to the celebration of saint's days. Almost any priest can lead a Lesser Sapeleh, although in most temples they are led by the Pelnala or one of the other masters. Regular masses renew the worshippers' dedication. Persons attending the mass usually bring a sacrifice or donation in kind or coin, according to their means. Most temples hold a Lesser Sapeleh mass on the fourth, twelfth, twentieth and twenty eighth.

Some personal/individual services are included in the Lesser Sapeleh. Most temples have chambers available to individuals or small groups who wish to worship privately. These private ceremonies usually consist of prayer or meditation which may or may not be assisted by an Ebasethe. Peonian worshippers who wish to make confession usually employ one such chamber. Confessors never insist on penance, although almost invariably suggest that penance, usually in the form of labour in the temple or among the sick or poor would "renew the spirit". Ebasethe who hear confessions of crimes, even serious or violent ones, will try to convince the culprits to submit to secular justice. If they fail, they will keep silent, something that may cause moral dilemmas for priests. In areas where the local authorities punish even minor crimes with death, mutilation or torture, Peonian priests have been known to suggest penance rather than surrender to the whims of secular judges.



Greater Sapeleh

The Greater Sapeleh is a four day purification rite that begins on fourteenth of each month and is undertaken only by priests above the rank of Esolani. At this time, the priests seclude themselves (as much as is practical) to fast, meditate, and pray, while maintaining silence. During the rite, they will perform only essential tasks, such as tending to the most seriously ill patients in their hospital. All other functions are performed by Esolani. On the third day of the Ceremony, the sixteenth day of the month, the priests gather in the hall of ritual for sixteen hours of vigilant, silent prayer. On the last day of the Ceremony they gather again for four hours of meditation. Priests who feel the need to confess some moral lapse in their behaviour do so at this time. Reslava also partake of the Purification Ceremony, usually arranging to visit a temple during the appropriate period, or making do on their own if necessary.

A special Purification Ceremony is held in the first month of each season. This Greater Sapeleh is followed by the "Turning", a special rite open to the Esolani. The priests discard their garb in a heap before the alter. One robe is selected from the pile and ceremonially burned (the rest are laundered and put away for next year). After the burning, the priests are called in turn by the Pelnala who gifts them with clean robes. Clerics of Peoni wear a different hue in each season. At this time, insignia of office/promotion are also distributed. The Pelnala praises those who have served particularly well during the preceding quarter.

The Turning is symbolic of renewal and the casting off of earthly impurities. It is concluded with hymns of praise to the season ending and the season beginning.

CANON LAW

The church of Peoni settles its few internal disputes by arbitration from a council made up of peers of the disputing parties. Decisions tend to be fair and an attempt is made to strike a compromise between the various points of view.

Persons bound over by secular authorities for crimes against a Peonian temple will face trial by ordeal to determine their guilt. Unlike other churches which drop the accused into tanks of water, force them to walk across hot coals, or otherwise endanger their lives, a Peonian cleric will ask three obscure doctrinal questions of the accused. If two are answered correctly, it is assumed that the goddess has interceded to provide knowledge that is normally restricted to the priesthood. Penalties inflicted on guilty persons are generally labour or, in extreme cases, imprisonment, but never involve injury or death.

SYMBOLS AND REGALIA

The clerics of Peoni change their garb with the season, wearing white in the winter, green in spring, beige in summer, and yellow in autumn. The number four is also significant to worships of Peoni, symbolizing the four members of the Aerlathos and the four seasons. Flowers and various fruits of the harvest are also used as symbols. Peonian churches are often decorated with sheafs of wheat or other crops during harvest time. Generally the regalia of the Peonian church is simple and functional. Priests, even the Hapalan do not wear elaborate dress, even on ceremonial occasions. This eschewing of exotic regalia can itself be seen as a symbol of humility.

Priests assigned to special offices are given pendants to wear as identification for the duration of their tenure. Mendicants wear small silver tetrahedrons upon their breasts. Orderial badges are modest in size, and made of cheap cloth, as are most priestly garments; the church has better uses for its wealth.

CALENDAR

The most important days of the Peonian year are the Restoration Festival on the fourth day of Peonu, and the Harvest Home on the fourth of Azura. The origins of these festivals are ancient. The Restoration Festival symbolizes the renewal of life after the cold of winter and the Harvest Home is a celebration to bless the harvest. The Harvest Home is the conclusion of four days of prayer, meditation and fasting, concluding with as lavish a feast as possible at which newly harvested crops are eaten. In the years that preceded the coming of the Aerlathos, the Harvest Home festivals often tended to be riotous or violent debauchs. Now they are peaceful, if merry, celebrations.

GEOGRAPHY

Peoni is the most commonly worshipped deity in western Lythia. The countryside is dotted with peasant-made shrines to Peoni. There wandering clerics may find shelter and warm hospitality. Ebasethes and Reslava are often found among the poor and sick, blessing their labours and easing their tasks with boundless comfort.

Despite the widespread influence of individual priests among the peasant and lower classes, the power of the Peonian church is not great. This is partly because of the social strata from which adherents are drawn, and partly because the church has relatively few wealthy or noble members.

In a few places, the Kingdom of Rethem on Harn for example, Peonianism is officially illegal, but she is still worshipped, and Reslava travel quietely from village to village and are ignored by the secular authorities.

CLERICAL ORDERS

The division of the Peonian church into separate and equal, celibate male and female orders dates from about 400 BT and was designed to conserve the spiritual purity of the clerics in the face of sexual temptation. It probably developed (in part) as a response to the hedonistic orgies that typified some ceremonies of pre-Aerlathos Peonian worship.

The orders have separate temples, or at least separate wings within common temples; the female order is called the Order of the Balm of Joy; the male order is called simply the "Irreproachable Order". They are approximately equal in size and importance, although in some areas one or the other has taken a dominant role. On Harn for example, the Irreproachable Order tends to look to the Order of the Balm of Joy for leadership.

THE HARNIC CHURCH

The primate of Peoni for Harn is the grandmistress of the Order of the Balm of Joy; her seat is in Thay. As of 720, the Hapalan and the Pelclunia of Harn are considering a petition from the western Harnic temples, that would create a second primacy in western Harn. The Harnic church is experiencing difficulties with communication. At present the Pelnala of the Aleath temple of the Order of the Balm of Joy (who is also the Archbishop of western Harn) fills many of the functions of a Primate. A decision from the Pelclunia and Halpalan is expected by 721.

THE IVINIAN CHURCH

The Peonian church is a recent arrival in Ivinia and requires substantial foreign aid to survive. The only temple (run by the order of the Balm of Joy) is located in the town of Jarehm. A small hospital is maintained there. The church of Peoni has always encountered difficulties in Ivinia. Its doctrine of forgiveness and peace is not one that appeals to the lusty, often violent, northerners, and it appeals mostly to the dregs of Ivinian society who have no where else to turn. None the less, the Peonians persist, showing the patience and kindness that has served them so well in the past.

King of the Icy Wind, Lord of the Perilous Quest and Wielder of the Blooded Axe, Master of Frosty Climes, the Grey Slayer."

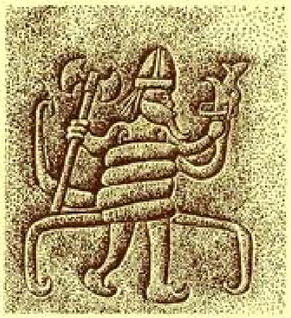
Sarajin is a god of battlelust, requiring fearlessness and bravado of his adherants. He loves the "sport" of war, and takes great pleasure in watching, and even participating in, large battles. The only virtue universally admired by adherants of Sarajin is courage. Sarajin is often viewed as the patron god of the Ivinians.

Sarajin usually portrayed as a giant, yellow-haired, bearded warrior clad in furs and leather, who rides across the snowy wastes in his sled, Shalka. He bears Fakang, his great double-bladed axe, which is able to split a mountain or cause storms or earthquakes.

THE ASCENT OF SARAJIN

According to Sarajinian myth, the world was once a maelstrom of primordial chaos from which eventually arose a pantheon of principles and deities, as well as a plethora of mortal creatures. Eventually each god took a kingdom to rule and Sarajin chose the rugged lands of Ivinia. He was forced to kill, subjugate or drive out the semi-divine entities collectively called the Pradeyalkri before he could take control of Ivinia. Sarajin's war was one of humanoids against monsters. After lengthy conflict Sarajin and his allies defeated an outlandish army of demonic beings. Among the creatures Sarajin had to defeat were his father Skarakyldrik and his grandfather Uyessegryn.

The lord of the Pradeyalkri was Suerlji, a horrific, serpentine, monster. Having remained atop his mountain perch (which some legends say was Mount Ilbengaad in Ivinia) for most of the battle, Suerlji met Sarajin in a duel to decide the dominion of Ivinia.



After a twelve day battle, Suerlji steadily weakened until, with a blow that "...caused the First Ones to gaze upon his might..." Sarajin hewed the serpent's head from its body.

TALAGAAD

Sarajin dwells in Talagaad, his ice castle in Yashain. The souls of his adherants who die in battle are taken there where they spend each day locked in combat. At dusk the fallen are revived and victors and vanquished orgy all night within the feasting halls of Talagaad. At dawn the battle is resumed. To a devout Sarajinian, this is paradise. Near Talagaad stands Meflygur, the tree of the blood of the slain, which grows a hundred crimson apples each night. It is said that mortals who eat the fruit are healed of wounds and gifted with immortality and youth.

THE PRADEYALKRI

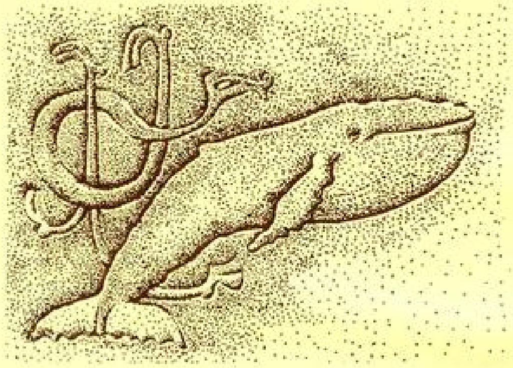
A few of the Pradeyalkyri aided Sarajin in his conquest. These were allowed to serve him after his triumph. The three most important are described below.

Usnarl Lord Of Bears

Usnarl, the great white bear, has the strength of twenty bears. Of all creatures, only Usnarl can defeat Sarajin in fair, unarmed combat. Despite his huge size, Usnarl is gentle. He has a profound empathy for helpless creatures and loathes despoilers of the forest.

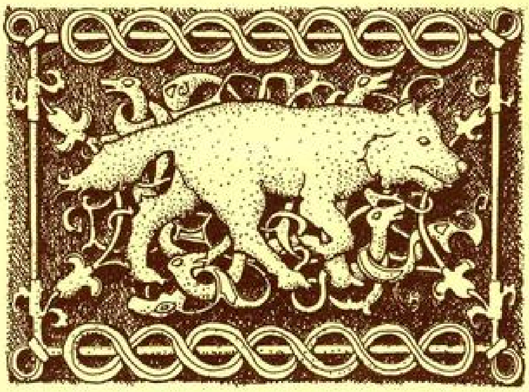
Njehu Lord Of Whales

Njehu is a great gray whale who spends most of his time sleeping on the sea bottom. He can cause terrible storms, but will also aid worthy travellers. Many tales tell of mariners shipwrecked on Njehu's back who remain unaware of the nature of their landfall until he bears them to safety (or dives).



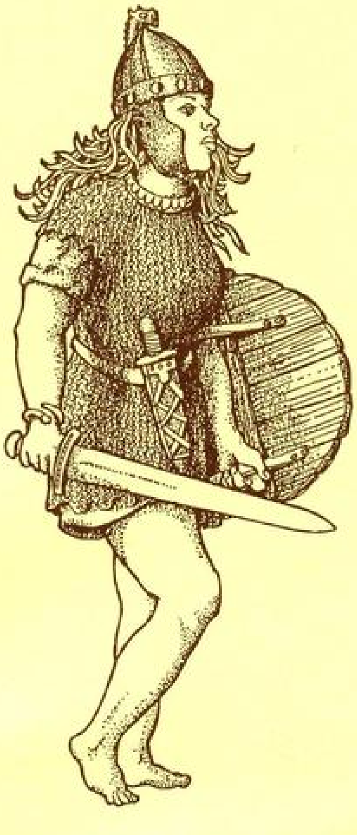
Jarlak Carrion Lord

Jarlak is the lupine master of several dozen huge white wolves that guard Talagaad. When Sarajin summons someone, he often dispatches Jarlak to fetch them. The wolf lord swallows them whole and regurgitates them at the god's feet in perfect health.



THE ELKYRI

The Elkyri are Sarajin's wives and helpmates, recruited from slain mortal women. Despite their immortality, they may be killed. Their numbers vary, and there are seldom more than a dozen. All is not harmonious between them, jealousy promotes rivalries, and squabbles are sometimes fatal, in spite of the fact that Sarajin will punish kinslaying harshly.



The Elkyri guide those who have died bravely on the field of battle to Talagaad. Many Sarajinians pray to an Elkyri instead of the god directly. Most Elkyri spend much of their time wandering incognito among mankind. Their abilities are strictly limited when they move among mortals. They usually adopt the forms they had in life, although they sometimes appear as ravens, Sarajin's favourite birds. Speaking an Elkyri's name three times will attract her attention. As of 720 there are eleven Elkyri:

Alaryr

Alaryr is the Elkyri who most loves the sea. Many Ivinian mariners pray to her, asking her to calm rough weather. She bears particular malice towards the Elkyri Ylina, believing that she failed to aid Alaryr's friend Jynaale, who was slain in 690 TR.

Bronwyne

The eldest and most often worshipped Elkyri. She is sometimes regarded as the dispenser of fate, and is very impatient. She is fond of battle, and spends considerable time among mortal men.

Deanaal

Deanaal most personifies the spirit of the Ljarl. She is the patron of young male warriors, many of whom pray to her. Deanaal is sometimes figuratively called upon to witness oaths and promises. Such an oath is deemed one of the most inviolable of contracts. As one Ivinian curse has it: "Who breaks faith on oath sworn before Deanaal, let him melt off the earth like snow off a hearth."

Easlyn

The sister of Freana, Easlyn is a relatively gentle entity, fond of song and poetry. She is revered by most Ivinian skalds, and is often credited with gifting them with "a hero's words".

Eynwif

The guardian of Meflygur, the sacred tree of Talagaad. She seldom leaves the proximity of the tree, and thus is the Elkyri who travels least among mortal men. She is a close friend of Bronwyne.

Freana

Easlyn's sister is one of the oldest Elkyri. She is fond of music, flowers, and young lovers. Sarajinian weddings traditionally end with prayer to her.

Gresalyne

Considered the patron of all women strong of heart and will, Gresalyne is stern and righteous in wrath, kind and gentle when necessary, and quick to intercede on behalf of female warriors.

Lynraal

The newest of the Elkyri, recruited upon her death in 702. She possesses a short, violent temper and loves nothing better than conflict. She and Bronwyne are bitter rivals, perhaps because of their similarities. Lynraal is illustrated opposite.

Maarne

Maarne is most often prayed to by those who farm. She is fond of the fruits of agriculture, and those who work and defend farmlands. Most Ivinian farmhouses contain a shrine to her.

Sendryl

A close friend of Freana and Easlyn, Sendryl is often called upon by those wishing children. She is fond of crafts, particularly weaving.

Ylina

The most learned of the Elkyri, Ylina is fond of those who seek knowledge, as well as poetry and song. She is the most solitary of the Elkyri.

THE AVALIR

The semi-divine children of Sarajin, the result of his liasons with mortal women. Although many women claim to have been visited by Sarajin and given birth to his progeny, it is likely that there are less than a dozen Avalir. Two are described below.

Idjar One Eye

The son of Sarajin and a female skald, Idjar used magic to enter Talagaad before his time and was cursed by Sarajin for his impudence. He now dwells at Idjarheim, his lodge in Ivinia, with one eye that views Kethira and another that looks upon Yashain. Despite the patch that he moves from one eye to the other, this has driven him slightly mad. He seldom speaks of his curse and grows angry if questioned too closely on it. The Elkyris Bronwyn, Easlyn, Freana, and Ylina pity him and often visit his home.

Skivaal The Mariner

One of the most celebrated of the Avalir is Skivaal:

Did silent Shalka bear its lord
Upon his lusty quest
To mortal's lodge where might he be
Unwilling maiden's guest.
And 'though she wept no mortal heard;
The god had bade them sleep.
When night had fled and morning come
They woke and heard her weep.

A maiden's son, unwanted born
Where cold white mountains drift
Upon the restless, bitter seas
That rage and drown and lift.
'Though tall and strong young Skivaal grew
And fair of heart and face
He won scant love among his kin
Among the mortal race.

And came the day his mother passed.
She named to him his sire
And Skivaal swore an oath to cast
His father to the fire.
A seaman of great ken he was
Who loved those northern seas
And Skivaal made a sturdy boat
Of old, enchanted trees.

And runes upon the bow he carved
To guide by weirding way
Far north to seek his father's hearth
A year's span and a day
And Sarajin the slayer gray
Perceived him on those seas
And he was touched by quest so brave,
But could not grant surcease.

The god who loves the hero's heart
But hates kinslayers all
Would find some way to save himself
Yet spare his son Skivaal.
For who shall pay the weirgild price
When slain and kin be one.
What god his honour can conserve
Who slays his mortal son?

For questing loved, for goal despised
Resolved he would not kill
His memories he stole from him
But left him questing still.
And still he quests in northern seas
Where gull and gray wave speaks
But knows not who his father is
So knows not what he seeks.

LJARL

The Ljarl is the code of honour advocated by the followers of Sarajin. Its dominant virtue is courage, although loyalty and duty are also stressed. This is interpreted to mean serving one's lord bravely, giving up life in his defence at need. The noblest achievement of a Sarajinian is to die in heroic battle; the perfect life is crowned, not demeaned, by the perfect death. Life and death are one; the manner of each is of utmost importance. Most worshippers of Sarajin try to live each day as if it were the last. Any opportunity for a drunken revel is seized, women are loved, wealth is spent, and everything is done with extravagance.

To devout Sarajinians, the Ljarl has the virtual force of physical law. It is a matter of pride that improper courses of action do not even occur to them. To behave dishonourably is literally unthinkable. The fact that in many situations there is only one honourable choice makes life simpler. The Ljarl is not lacking in subtlety, however. The tragedies of internecine strife figure prominently in northern myth, and Sarajinians are fond of such quandries. Situations of honourable men forced to choose between dishonourable options are favourite subjects of folk tales.

An extreme product of the Ljarlic code is the berserker. These are fanatical warriors whose lords' have perished despite them. Once vengence has been exacted, they often feel they have no real reason to live, particularly if they cannot find a new lord. Most seek an honourable death at the earliest opportunity, wandering aimlessly about, perhaps obtaining temporary employment as mercenaries. Many are able to work themselves into an inhuman frenzy in battle.

EARLY CHURCH

The origins of the church of Sarajin are obscure, the more so because of its general level of disorganization and the tendency to meld history and myth until they are virtually indistinguishable. Some tales tell that Sarajin himself led the Ivinians into their present homes in the northlands. While this (like the Ascent of Sarajin) can be safely regarded as fantasy it seems likely that the worship of Sarajin has its roots in the ancient history of the Ivinian people.

Bjarri Threehand

The "Saga of Bjarri Threehand", while being as richly embroidered as any Ivinian myth, seems to contain some truth regarding the establishment of the church. Bjarri was a skald (bard) who lived during the second (?) century BT. While travelling in the dead of winter he was beset by wolves and forced to fight for his life. Bjarri was a skilled and valiant warrior and was able to hold off his attackers "for three passages of the sun and moon". Finally, exhausted, and weakened by innumerable wounds, he collapsed while facing his final opponent, a great, snow white wolf.

Bjarri awoke to find himself unhurt and overlooking a ferocious battle. He witnessed many courageous deeds as the conflict progressed, each warrior striving valiantly for supremacy. At dusk the battle ceased and the survivors left the field together in good spirits. At this point Bjarri became aware that he had been joined by two armed women. They led Bjarri to a great mead hall where hundreds of men roistered and drank. On a dias sat a massive, burly warrior with golden hair, who beckoned the skald to a seat beside him. Bjarri was provided with the finest of meat and drink and listened to tale after tale of bravado and courage. Finally his host spoke, saying:

> "Look long upon the best and boldest and take forth the tale of my house. Speak unto those of fierce heart who revel in the fullness of strength, and fear not the long night, that they may look unto me for reward in life and death."

Bjarri pleaded to be allowed to remain in Talagaad, but Sarajin was adamant and Bjarri was returned to the lands of mortal men. From then until his death in battle at a late age, he spoke and sang of Sarajin, attracting numerous followers who in turn spread the doctrine throughout the northlands. So attractive was the mythos to the northmen that by the first century TR it was virtually the universal Ivinian religion.

ORGANIZATION

Where worship of Sarajin is common, the religious needs of the community are met by freeclans whose clanhouses serve as temples. Most are loosely organized. Temple-clanhouses are founded by one who "hears the call". If the new clan prospers, then the "call" was clearly real. Sometimes, an overlarge clan will send some of its members to establish a new clanhouse. Whatever aid and wealth is sent with them, they will eventually become independent. The Valhakar (clanhead) of the clerical clan is effectively the high priest. He governs the temple and interprets the religious mysteries. Command of the mysteries of the Sarajinian priesthood is part of the clan's heritable property. It is shared among clanmembers and laity as deemed appropriate by the Valhakar.

Sarajinians are not particularly dogmatic, but theological disputes do arise from time to time. If one clan dislikes what another is preaching, it may wage a private temple war to resolve the issue. The debate may spread to include more temples, but disputes rarely grow to include more than a few clans.

Clans embarking on a viking expedition often hire a cleric to accompany them. He would meet the religious needs of the party and would probably wield an axe with the rest of them; his clan would receive a negotiable share of the booty. Income is also obtained from those who seek blessings on their endeavours, their houses or their families. Payment for religious services is not deemed improper, but, absolution from sin is frequently paid for in silver.

There is no pontiff in the Sarajinian religion. The closest equivalent is at Molima, the stronghold of Clan Beldesa, and the centre of the Ivinian kingdom of Eldeskaal. Molima was founded in 235 TR by Djarni Beldesa and a dozen followers who felt that they were on a divine mission. They built a clanhouse on the shore of Lake Temis, overlooked by Mount Ilbengaad, the Holy Mountain of Sarajinian myth. There are now more than six thousand residents of the small religious kingdom. Devout worshippers of Sarajin try to make at least one pilgrimage to Molima in their lifetime. Clan Beldesa has never made any attempt to claim the dominance of the church, nor has it attempted to codify Sarajinian doctrine.

CULT OF THE ELKYRI

The Cult of the Elkyri is a only known Sarajinian clerical order. It is located on the windswept isle of Kyrihem, off the west coast of Ivinia. The island is deemed sacred because of several dozen graves of women who are believed to have become Elkyri after death. The order maintains a temple on the island and is primarily devoted to preservation of the site. The priestesses of the order decide, with divine guidance, who may be buried there. Kyriheim, like Molima, is the destination of many Sarajinian pilgrims who sustain the order through offerings. The temple is also home to the Oracle of Lokis, a foreteller of destiny of considerable accuracy.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

For most Ivinians, religion is a matter of everyday life, almost taken for granted. There is very little in the way of formal ritual. Sarajinians respect their myths and their clergy, but are not overly reverent. History and religious myth are intertwined in eddas, the tales of heroes, gods and the divine. Generations of skalds have embroidered the eddas until little remains of the relatively mundane originals.

Although skalds are not generally clerics or members of clerical clans, nonetheless they fill important roles in reinforcing the worship of Sarajin. Skalds memorize, recite and embellish the eddas; some dwell within the houses of great lords, most wander. They are highly respected, the guardians of an essentially oral tradition.

SYMBOLS AND REGALIA

Sarajin is commonly symbolized by Fakang, his battleaxe, Shalka, his sled, a pair of crossed handaxes, or one of his Pradeyalkri servants. Many pious adherants of the King of the Icy Wind wear one or more representations of these symbols on their persons. Clerics of Sarajin have no particular mode of dress and almost nothing in the way of formalized robes; most are warriors and will dress accordingly.

CALENDAR

The two most important festivals in the Sarajinian year both occur in the month of Kelen (Saraju to Ivinians). The first is the Ilbengaad Festival held from the tenth to the twelfth. Each year hundreds of pilgrims arrive at Molima in Ivinia, ascending Mount Ilbengaad on the tenth to celebrate amid the snows. Events consist of one day and night of feasting and drinking, one day of semi-ritual combat, and one day of prayer and recovery. There is a significant fatality rate among the celebrants, and those who die are deemed to go straight to Talagaad. Many believe that they are transported to the home of Sarajin during the battle or report seeing strange creatures during the combat. Although the Ilbengaad Festival is properly held only at the mountain, the three days are usually celebrated in some form by Sarajinians everywhere.

The second festival is called Bjarri's Feast, a celebration that occurs between the nineteenth and the twenty fifth of the month. This consists of a series of seven feasts during which eddas and tales are recited and sung in praise of Sarajin. These feasts are generally hosted by clerical clans with donations from their local congregations. They are as lavish as possible. Other features include ritual combats, some of which are fatal.

GEOGRAPHY

The "King of the Icy Wind" suits the northmen and their clime. As a result, worship of Sarajin has been concentrated almost exclusively among Ivinians, either in their homeland or in their scattered colonies. Because of the wide ranging nature of Ivinian culture, Sarajinianism has spread to many parts of western Lythia. Generally, however, the religion has little appeal to those who are not of Ivinian ancestry.

THE HARNIC CHURCH

On Harn, the worship of Sarajin is concentrated in Orbaal, although there are a few small clanhouses in southeastern Harn. In Orbaal, the church of Sarajin is far from popular with the conquered Jarin people, who closely identify the religion with their oppressors.

Lord of Puzzles, Conundrums and Mazes, Sage of the Gods, Lord of Jesters, Mixer of Potions, Knower of Many Things, Keeper of the Var-Hyvrak, The Lost Guide."

Save-K'nor is most commonly depicted as the Lost Guide, an aged sage bearing Uhla, the lantern that gives no light, and is symbolic of the interminable nature of the quest for knowledge and the futility of the search for absolute truth. His other aspects include Redira the whimsical, and sometimes musical jester, and Omono, the beggar who seeks enlightenment, but receives only common alms.

Adherents of the church have no particular moral bent beyond loyalty to the church and its objectives. However, belief in an ordered society seems to preclude evil or chaotic behaviour, and the occasional need to take ruthless action is repugnant to selfless persons.

INOR TETH

The legendary residence of Save-K'nor is called Inor Teth, a massive blocky structure commonly believed to lie on neutral ground on the world of Yashain. Inor Teth is a massive and complex structure of chambers and hallways whose every wall is inscribed with knowledge; every script and language used in the Kethrian worlds is represented, and all (?) the knowledge of man and beast is present. Much of what is written is impossible to understand, for the spatial relationships of data are critically important. In theory, all the secrets of the universe are modeled by the edifice. Inor Teth is called the Penultimate Maze. The ultimate maze is the universe itself, of which Inor Teth is a comprehensive, but incomplete model. To add to the complexity of the maze, it is populated by the Vaenya, "the Scribes of the High Archive", deceased adherents of the diety whose tasks include the continuing construction of new wings, and the bearing of messages from one part of the maze to another. The knowledge carried by the Scribes and the routes they take are also parts of the puzzle.

Save-K'nor's greatest treasure is the Var-Hyvrak, the Illimitable Tome, in which "all" mortal and divine knowledge is kept. This is the work on which Inor Teth is based, its architectural plan. The tome's location is ambiguous. Some hold that it is hidden deep within Inor Teth, some believe that it is "between worlds", no single plane being able to contain it. Some believe that it is just another name for Inor Teth itself, and some assert that it is contained within the mind of the deity, merely a symbol for the great knowledge of Save-K'nor. All agree that the Var-Hyvrak is well hidden and incomprehensible to mortals.

THE KE'LHA-HY-VAR-HYVRAK

Save-K'nor's most important role is arbiter of the Ke'lha-hy-Var-Hyvrak, the Concordat of the Illimitable Tome. The Concordat was concluded to stave off the chaos that was likely to result from the unfettered actions of the gods, and the unbridled sharing of lore. The terms of the Concordat were that "all knowledge" was gathered and hidden in the Illimitable Tome, where, it was hoped, it would be safe from misuse. The seal on the knowledge was not complete; those who could acquire knowledge by their own efforts were judged fit to know. The limit on an individual's knowledge became his cunning and imagination.

The Concordat established limitations on the ways in which the dieties could compete with each other for domination. Part of these restrictions applied to the quality and quantity of divine intervention in the affairs of mortals. The gods were limited in the ways in which they aid their adherents. The articles themselves are incomprehensible to mere mortals.

THE ARCHIVAL COURT

The Concordat gave Save-K'nor a special position in the affairs of the gods. The fact that only he had unlimited access to the Var-hyvrak, made him the arbiter of the Concordat, although it is likely that not even he understands the entire Tome. It is in the interest of all the gods that the Concordat be maintained, but the affairs of the divine are complex; it is not always apparent which course of action or inaction has the best chance of preserving the peace. Hence, Save-K'nor is the most neutral of the gods, an arbiter of disputes. Save-K'nor's rulings are generally supported by at least a majority of the gods.

THE ALTHAR

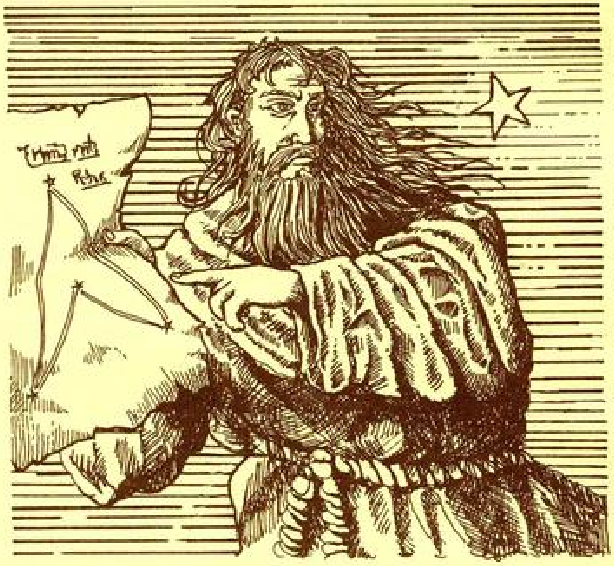
The chief servants of Save-K'nor are the nine Judges of the High Archive. They preside over the Vaenya and perform specialized tasks for the god.

Althea (The Truthsayer)

Althea is only entity other than Save-K'nor himself who is able to use Uhla, and is charged with its custody when the god is not carrying it himself. It purportedly "sheds light that can be seen by no mortal man", that is symbolic of hidden knowledge. When the unseen light of Uhla is shed by Althea or the deity, all secrets are exposed.

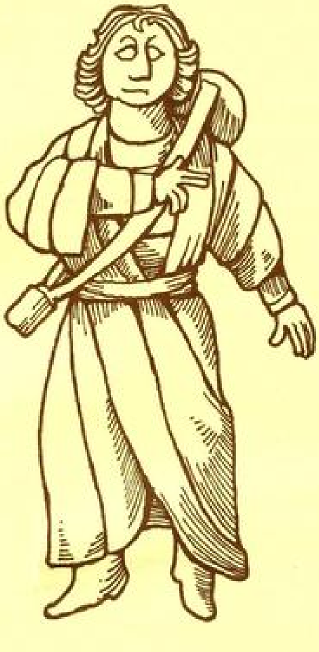
Argenon (The High Riddler)

The Lord of Enigmas, Argenon is the most intelligent of the Althar, a creator and solver of riddles. Argenon fetches interesting puzzles from the mortal plane for his master's amusement. He also creates puzzles, and answers difficult questions for the other Althar. Argenon is believed to have fathered a number of demi-divine children on Kethira and elsewhere. The Riddlemaster of Anrist Point (on Harn) may be one such.



Bronduschithrin (The Lord of Lies)

Known also as the Taleweaver, Brondus has charge of fiction and legends. His repetoire of stories is said to be limitless, and his style of telling hypnotic. Brondus is commonly portrayed as a young, dashing wanderer with a lute slung over his shoulder. He is the minstrel of the Archival Court. He also has the more serious function of hiding or confusing dangerous knowledge, hence his name the Lord of Lies. It is said of Bronduschithrin that he, "never speaks true where a lie would do".



Deocala, Desaria, And Detasia (The Searchers)

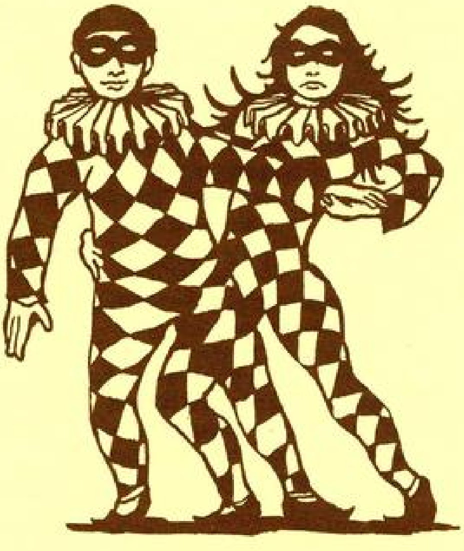
These three are dedicated to the gathering of knowledge in all its forms. Their search carries them throughout Kelestia as they seek out knowledge to be recorded in the Var-Hyvrak and upon the walls of Inor Teth. Portrayed as women of gentle bearing and soft beauty, the trio come often into contact with mortal folk and are the subject of several tales and songs. Adventurous adherents may attempt to emulate the three by undertaking quests for knowledge on the mortal plane.

Thonahexus (Herald of Inor Teth)

Thonahexus sits in a high throne atop Inor Teth (the location of the only gate) watching in all directions. It is his task to deal with visitors. It is said that he knows every living thing by sight. Those of importance are announced to the deity or to one of the other Althar. Lesser beings may be permitted to enter and peruse the upper levels if they can answer a riddle which may be posed by Thonahexus, by Argenon or by one of the Scribes of the High Archive.

Yerit And Ilyasha (The Teachers)

A male-female team, these two Althar are the patrons of the performing arts. Portrayed either as jesters or thespians, Yerit and Ilyasha are the quintessential performers. Dramatists often murmur quick invocations of them to help insure a flawless performance. Their function beyond this is obscure. Most believe that they are responsible for non-intellectual knowledge, the gathering of emotion.



THE VAENYA

Inor Teth is also the heaven of the mortal adherents of Save-K'nor. Those who serve the god well in life are elevated to the Vaenya after death. The duties of the Vaenya are not onerous. They must build and inscribe the walls of Inor Teth, carry messages, serve the Althar at need and occasionally fetch information from the mortal plane. Much of their time, however, may be spent simply reading the writing on the walls. To one with the bent to worship the Divine Sage, this is truly heaven.

EARLY CHURCH

Eilar Of Ironoth (The Guide of the Vision)

The one revered as the founder of the church of Save-K'nor was called Eilar of Ironoth. He had an unhappy childhood. He was solitary and studious by nature, while his parents were hard-working farmers, with no time for abstraction. Eilar ran away from home at the age of sixteen. The young prophet's self-imposed exile was in the harsh Azeryani Drylands, an area where he could live as a hermit without many disturbances. Eilar came close to dying several times; thirst and hunger were his enemies. His greatest trial came when, delirious from thirst, he gazed long at the sun. The rain came to save his life, but his eyes would never see again.

Eilar looked upon his trials as a kind of tempering. He learned to function with his other senses and his blindness helped him perceive things beyond mortal ken. After nine years in the wilderness, he had his vision of the mission he was to perform. It is believed that during this time he was visited by each of the Althar in turn. Each brought a different message which, taken together, became the Token of Uhla, the Holy Sanction of the Sage of Heaven.

The purpose of the church was to mirror on the mortal plane, the function of Save-K'nor and his court in heaven. They were to gather knowledge from the world over, hiding what was dangerous, meagerly spooning out hints and lore to individuals where this might preserve order, acting as an arbiter of religious dispute. This was a complicated mission, and has yet to be fully achieved.

Daemar, Kithrond And Arin

Eilar summoned the three closest companions of his youth, Daemar, Kithrond, and Arin, revealing to each a portion of his vision, and asking for their faith. They became disciples, and lived with him for four years in the wilderness. After they had learned all that Eilar would teach, their master gave each a tome, containing the articles they were to abide by, and spoke to the three together:

> "Thou knowst that ignorance is the father of contempt. He that understands not, loves not, but he who comprehends is beloved of the Sage. Learn that which is worthy; respect shall be thine. From knowledge shall thou tune thy very being, the sum of that which thou knowest, worthy of the Inscribed chambers. Trust and fear truth as thou would the Sage himself. The deepest secrets are terrible and are not revealed to the unchosen. Know the limits within thy self, for 'though they are of thy own design, they are real. Beware the temptations of excess and sloth for they are the stealers of thy wit. He who forgets his creed shall lose his wisdom, and only the stars will remember what once was."

Then Eilar lay down, his heart stopped, and he died. The disciples were shocked; they buried the prophet and departed the wilderness.

Origin Of The Orders

Daemar, Kithrond and Arin soon realized that the contents of their tomes differed greatly. Their paths were to diverge. Each was to perform a different task. Each would found a clerical order with its own specific purpose, but the unity of the church was to be preserved.

Kithrond Of The Hyn-Aelori

The function of the Hyn-Aelori was almost entirely to gather and hoard scrolls, books, legends, whatever information they could obtain. They were to be archivists and would be chosen for their love of knowledge for its own sake. Theirs was not to use the knowledge.

Arin Of The Rydequelyn

Sophisticated members of the Hyn-Aelori would find their ways into the Rydequelyn. Their function was to destroy dangerous ideas, by ridicule and confusion. To this end, they performed elaborate practical jokes, satires and distractions, to remind people of their mortality and fallability, and to expose dangerous nonsense. Usually, their work would be anonymous, since important people are not likely to enjoy such attentions.

Daemar Of The Shea-Al-Aecor

Daemar had always been a serious intellectual. His was the deepest and most complex mission. Members of the Shea-al-Aecor were the intellectual elite of the church, drawn from the other orders. The order's true mission was revealed only to its members, and is still a well-guarded secret. Daemar's order was to use the knowledge and wisdom of the church, albeit covertly, first to obtain a secure position for the church, then to shape social and political institutions. Their long term goal was to build a society of stable individuals, able to reacquire the arts and learning taken from their irresponsible ancestors.

Spread Of The Faith

Clerics of Save-K'nor never made public statements, at least not with the sanction of the church. They moved quietly in elite social circles, making converts among the intelligentsia on a one to one basis. Nor did they seek to convert large numbers. They believed, and still believe, that society is always controlled by a few key individuals; these are the people that interest them. The laity remained small. In some regions, it was barely larger than the priesthood.

Temples were usually built in larger settlements. They were supported by wealthy members of the lay-congregation, and by well-educated priests who held positions outside the church.

ORGANIZATION

The temple is the basic unit of the church. Temples are designated as belonging to one or more of the three orders. Single order temples are most common, especially those of the Hyn-Aelori which tend to be the largest. The second most common temples belong to the Rydequelyn, and the rarest are those of the Shea-al-Aecor. The temples of the Hyn-Aelori display aspects of a university, albeit one that is not open to the public. Only the Hyn-Aelori accept acolytes. Some people look upon the church as a haven for intellectuals and estranged scholars; this view has an element of truth.

Indoctrination

Those who would join the priesthood must make a contribution of some kind to a temple of the Hyn-Aelori, preferably an ancient or original treatise which they stand ready to explain or defend against the temple experts. Those who do not meet high standards of wisdom and intelligence are not considered worthy adherents.

Probationary acolytes (and a few paying students) are given a broad education in philosopy and theology, as well as several other arts and lores. They undergo a rigorous examination of their intelligence and learning after one year. If their progress is satisfactory, they may remain.

The Manidar (Acolytes)

The Manidar perform menial functions and are expected to educate themselves by attending lectures and seminars held by temple experts. At least once yearly they must submit themselves to the masters for examination on a topic of their choice, and all acolytes are expected to master the rudiments of church doctrine and temple philosophy. They cannot advance unless they do so. Once they have passed examinations on six separate subjects, and have also demonstrated literacy in at least two scripts and mastery of at least two foreign languages, they are graduated into the Haliki. As a mark of rank, newly graduated Haliki receive a hexagonal tattoo; in most regions it is placed around the left eye. If one of the Manidar completes all six examinations in only three years, or if he completes twelve examinations in six years, he is examined by the Father Visitor (see below). Such special individuals are almost invariably transferred to the Rydequelyn or the Shea-al-Aecor where they begin again as acolytes, but will face more difficult tests. Acolytes are assigned advisors, usually from the Haliki.

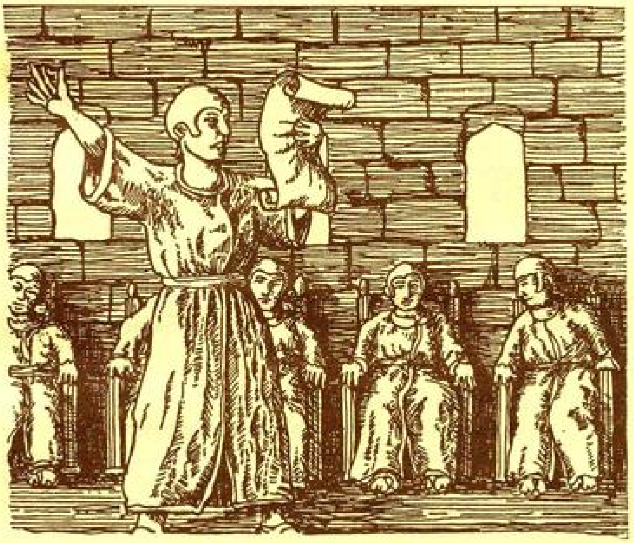
The Haliki (Priests/Priestesses)

Those who have passed beyond the status of acolyte are freed from most menial tasks and spend their efforts in developing command of one or more specialties. The Haliki organize their own educations. They may, within reasonable limits, study freely in the temple archives. They usually attend lectures and seminars given by the Loremasters in their own and sometimes other temples.

Priests are given various administrative functions. Each will normally be assigned as mentor to one or more acolytes. They may be called upon to assist one of the masters in a project, serve as messengers, copy or translate difficult manuscripts, and so on. If they themselves require advice they may call upon the Rowanti or on the Falorin (below). If they require assistance, they may use their acolytes. They may also be called upon to direct the rituals or education of the laity.

The Labours Of Reverence

At various times, usually at least once yearly, Haliki submit "Labours of Reverence" to the the Loremasters. Such are usually intellectual works (which must be defended at need) but quests to gather/recover lost artifacts or works, translations of old/difficult manuscripts, and works of art (particularly in the Rydequelyn) may also be accepted. When thirty six labours have been accepted by the masters (some labours may be counted as several) the Haliki is elevated to the rank of Rowanti.



Exceptional individuals may be examined at any time by the Father Visitor and, possibly transferred to another order.

The Rowanti (Loremasters)

Each temple has several Rowanti. These are the venerated masters of the temple and are given great leeway in their activities. They are not administrative officers. The Rowanti have mastered at least one field of learning. The only official functions of the Rowanti are to further study their subject(s), to teach, and to examine, accept or reject the labours of reverence of the Haliki. In order to be a Rowanti, one must know more about a subject than anyone else in the temple. The Council of Electors is comprised of the six most senior Rowanti, while most administrative positions are held by ordinary priests.

Intellectual Background

Original thinking is, if anything, encouraged by church dogma. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that so many independent Lythian secular philosophers have ascribed to K'norianism. Save-K'nor is the patron deity of many heralds, sorcerers, jesters and bards as well as of scholars. Many priests, as well as members of the laity, have held high political positions. There is nothing to prevent a high-ranking priest from living and taking an active role in secular society.

TEMPLE ADMINISTRATION

The Tryahlar (Council of Electors)

The six most senior Rowanti form a council, called the Tryahlar, whose function is to elect priests to fill administrative offices. Members of the Tryahlar may not hold such offices themselves. If, as rarely occurs, one of their number is elected, he will resign from the Tryahlar which will function without replacing him. The Tryahlar meets whenever an administrative position falls vacant. It also meets once a year to review the performances of officers.

The Ibarti (High Deacon)

Elected by the Tryahlar as the temple's chief administator. The Ibarti takes charge of general policy, especially external relations. He serves for up to six years then steps aside, although in rare cases Ibarti have been elected for additional terms.

The Serini (Keeper of the Holy Lore)

The officer, elected by the Tryahlar to care for the sacred artifacts and scriptures. A Serinti is expert on matters of myth, ritual and theology and is usually familiar with the practices of other churches. The Serinti is called upon to preside over most temple rituals, and examines acolytes on matters of theology and sacred lore. Unlike most administrative positions, that of the Serinti is usually filled by one of the Rowanti.

The Deronti (Archivist)

The officer elected by the Tryahlar to direct the care, preservation and, at need, copying of non-sacred temple archives. He also helps direct acolytes in their studies. The Deronti is expected to be familiar with the contents of his library. Most are also aware of the contents of other temple and secular archives. The Deronti also examines acolytes on matters of knowledge.

The Falorin (Councillor)

Elected by the Tryahlar as the acolytes' advocate. This is usually a fairly junior priest. His task is to council and assist students with their projects. If they encounter difficulties with sacred or secular authorities, he may be called upon to represent his charges. In large temples, the responsibilities may be shared between several Falorin. In some temples, the Falorin is elected by the acolytes.

The Olunar (Seneshal)

The officer elected by the Tryahlar to take charge of the day to day running of the temple. He organizes such activities as meals, cleaning and laundry, drawing upon the acolytes as necessary. This is not a particularly popular position.

The Maecor (Father Visitor)

Found only in temples of the Hyn-Aelori and Rydequelyn, the Maecor is appointed by the primate to advise the Council of Electors and administrative officers. His advice is given serious consideration for two reasons. First, he is the direct representative of the Primate, and through him, the Pontiff. Second, he has the power to dismiss any officer or to suspend the authority of the Council of Electors and govern the temple on an interim basis. Such unilateral actions are rarely taken; displaced individuals may appeal decisions to the Primate and thence to the Pontiff, but the Father Visitor is hardly ever overruled. Another duty of the Maecor is the examination of acolytes and priests with a view to transferring them to other orders.

CENTRAL AUTHORITY

The Rion Ishar (Pontiff)

The chief mortal priest of Save-K'nor is traditionally the grandmaster of the Shea-al-Aecor. The pontifical seat is the city of Berema in Emelrene, but most of the administrative functions are conducted at the temple complex of Ishranor, some five leagues outside the town. The pontiff appoints officers to fill vacant regional posts, subject to confirmation by the Enclave. The pontiff is responsible for the day to day administration of the church, and for various ritual functions. In many ways, this is a ceremonial office.

The Ishranor Enclave

The high council of the church of Save-K'nor is called the Enclave and consists of the Primates (or their deputies), the grandmasters of all three orders and up to six others appointed by the pontiff. All members are Rowanti. The Enclave meets at need. It has the right to set policy and the power to elect or dismiss any officer of the church, including the pontiff.

The Deor Ishar (Primate)

The church of Save-K'nor divides the known world into several ecclesiastical provinces, called primacies. Each province is administered by a primate who, a senior member of the Shea-al-Aecor, who is appointed by the pontiff (subject to ratification by the Ishranor Enclave). The Deor Ishar selects Father Visitors for each of the temples within his primacy. The primate is himself a member of the Enclave, and appoints one or more deputies to represent him; if he is at Ishranor, his deputy takes charge of the province. If the primate is in his provice, as most are most of the time, his deputy resides at Ishranor.

COMMUNICATIONS

The church of Save-K'nor has perhaps the finest communications network in the known world. Acolytes and priests are constantly bearing messages back and forth. In addition, it is suspected that the church has at its disposal certain esoteric artifacts able to transmit words/thoughts instantaneously (?) over great distance. These are called the Pelenra and may be of Earthmaster origin. It is thought that there is one in the possession of each primate and several at Ishranor. It is hardly surprising that this church should place such an emphasis on the movement of information.

When the church wishes to convey secret information, it employs an elaborate system of codes and ciphers. Cryptography is so important to the church that it is considered a field of academic study on a par with mathematics and geography and may be specialized in by priests and Loremasters. The codes used by the church are changed at irregular intervals and temples periodically sell systems to outside authorities.

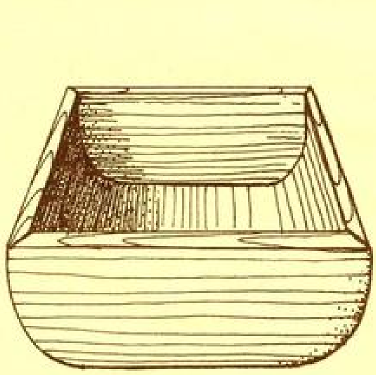
SEREN RITUALS

Rituals of worship in the church of the Sage of Heaven are relatively succinct and infrequent. Ceremonies are divided into three classes. The lowest are those of the Seren. The Seren is a committee appointed by the Serinti (Keeper of the Holy Lore). It consists of one Loremaster, two priests and three acolytes and its duty is to lead the low (Seren) rituals of the temple for one month, at which time a new Seren is selected. Seren rituals may be attended by any adherent; some may be attended by outsiders under consideration for entry into the church.

Morning Ablution

Pious adherents begin each day with a ritual ablution designed to "wipe clean the slate for the day to write upon new mysteries". If it is not possible for a K'norian to attend the temple's hall of ritual where the Seren leads a mass ablution, he must manage as best he can on his own. The morning ablution is best conducted at dawn, but not all K'norians rise so early. The common ablution consists of anointing with blessed water six points, the forehead, each eyelid, the mouth, throat and heart. The holy water is allowed to dry as the supplicant meditates. In the temple, the Seren preaches a "lesson", some philosophical observations on mathematics, ethics, metaphysics, etc. or some parable or story designed to aid the congregation in daily life. Supplicants who are alone go through the "Six Litanies". The ceremony concludes with any of several prayers to the diety. The congregation may then conduct a brief morning toilet. Individuals often take this opportunity to chat with each other, pass news, and so on. Then they disperse and go about their businesses.

K'norians own personal ablution bowls. These are used to carry water to the priests for blessing, and to convey the water after it is blessed. Designs vary. The most common types are the cube and the hexagon, but this is mostly a matter of personal taste and wealth. All ablution bowls can be sealed. Boys of K'norian families are presented with personal bowls on their eleventh birthdays. The church must sanction each bowl made and collects a tax called "pure pence" whenever one is sold.



The Velere

Held once monthly, on the sixth, by the Seren and open to any adherent. The mass is used to sing the praises of the diety and to invoke his guidance and aid. The ceremony lasts about an hour. and is usually held half an hour after dusk.

The Keserne

Held on the sixth of Savor each year. This is a special celebration of the acts of the saints as well as being a lay mass. Pious K'norians fast for at least two days before the ritual, and arrive at the temple at noon to begin six hours of silent meditation. Following the silence, the Serinti recites the metaphysical background of the church and the history of the deity and his semi-divine servants, followed by the acts of the mortal founders of the church. The congregation punctuates the long tale with hymns on the same subject(s). The ceremony generaly lasts past midnight, by the time it is over the history of the religion will have been covered.

The Hasern

These activities are more like study sessions than religious ceremonies. The congregation gathers in the hall of riutal of the temple for a lecture by one of the Rowanti. The lecture is preceded by a prayer and followed by a seminar. The object is a broadening of knowledge. About half the Hasern sessions are open to the laity; it depends on the subject. Most Hasern are held in the evenings; they generally last two to four hours.

The Inbarin

The high rituals of the church are open only to the priesthood. They are conducted by the Serenti himself. These are invocations of the deity and a sincere request for guidance. Although the priests gather together in the hall of ritual and chant the Prayer of Forthcoming in chorus, each meditates on his own in an all night vigil before the alter. Inbarin are held following the monthly and feast lay masses.

SYMBOLS AND REGALIA

The numbers four, five and especially six have symbolic significance for K'norians. The practice of tattooing priests with a hexagon is only one manifestation of the church's preoccupation with this mystical number. Beyond this, K'norians use a variety of symbols. Uhla the black lantern is prominent; a replica is borne by all priests who hold administrative office within the church. Complex spirals and spiral-like designs sometimes figure in the regalia of all three orders. Harlequin-like chequeys of four are used by some temples of the Rydequelyn, with bright masks over the upper face. Officers of the Hyn-Aelori may carry a short rod carved in the shape of a furled scroll.

THE ORDERS

The three orders of the church have always played different roles. They are all universal throughout western Lythia. See also "The Early Church" above.

Hyn-Aelori (Order of the Sage of Heaven)

The Hyn-Aelori is the largest order. They are the guardians of some of the greatest literary collections of the known world. They are, however, very conservative. Their function is to collect and preserve knowledge, not to share it with the populace at large, although a few paying lay-students are educated within temples of the Hyn-Aelori.

Rydequelyn (Order of the Fool)

In most regions, the Rydequelyn is the most prominent order, although they are only the second largest. The order operates largely within guidelines set by the Shea-al-Aecor to destroy or confuse dangerous information. Members tend to be artistic. Many jesters ascribe to this order, which is best known for its elaborate (but anonymous) practical jokes. The Rydequelyn tends to be unpopular among the ruling classes.

Shea-Al-Aecor (Order of the Lost Guide)

The senior order contains the most intelligent and knowledgeable members. The Shea-al-Aecor sets overall policy for the church, and uses its accumulated wisdom covertly for the betterment of human society, as they define it. Lay and priestly members are employed in the governments of several states especially Melderyn, Emelrene and the Azeryan Empire. They are competent bureaucrats, partly because if they are not, their own church removes them. Members of a number of noble families throughout Lythia also ascribe to this order. Those who employ K'norians are used to the idea that the church has its own objectives, which are not necessarily identical to those of the rulers, but K'norians are also known to be essentially loyal; they will not act contrary to the interests of their employers.

Master of the Lords of Dream, Bringer of Meritorius Dreams and Blessed Forgetfulness, Lord of the Starlit and Thrice-blessed Realm, King of the Uttermost West, Master of the Sundered Ones in Exile, Spirit of the Mist, the Never-changing Lord of the Azure Bowl."

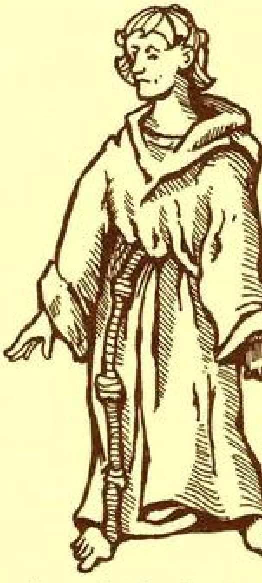
The Lord of the Starlit Realm most often appears as an elven lord garbed in a mantle of flowing green and silver, a wreath of stars upon his head. His face and body bear no clue of age, but his eyes project wisdom, and his aura projects confused feelings of strength and longing. Siem is surrounded by an air of sadness, of "otherwhereness"; in this, he is much like his special folk, the elves.

The King of the Uttermost West is the eldest of the lesser gods, and probably the wisest. Certainly, his is the greatest power to perceive the future, and his is the closest affinity with time itself. Siem is patient above all others, one who is prepared to wait. It is said that Siem was first offered, but refused, the guardianship of the Illimitable Tome, nominating Save-K'nor in his stead.

To most, Siem is known for his sending of pleasant and oracular dreams, and for the gift of forgetfulness, the salve of unpleasant memories. His actions are subtle, but in the long run effective, more apt to confuse than harm.

Sweldre (The Prince of Stars)

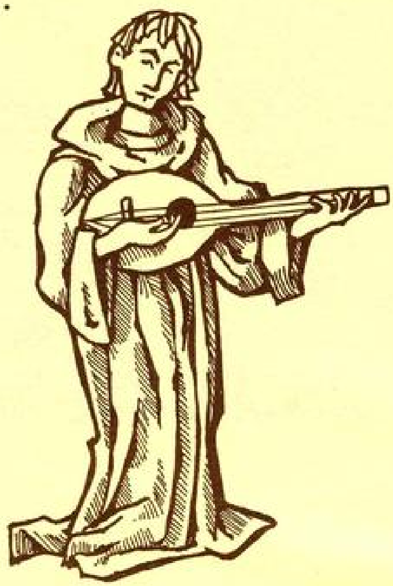
The "Half Lord" is the semi-autonomous demigod who intercedes on behalf of the dwarves at the court of Siem. Sereniel is most often portrayed as a slim, fine-featured man of average height. His left hand is made of fine iron, with which he judges the Khuzdul who have passed away; the spirit of the departed is crushed in his hand. If the spirit withstands, it is judged worthy of the Blessed Realm; if the spirit becomes dust, it is blown by the winds back to the mountain roots of mortal planes, from where it may be (ultimately) reborn. Sereniel is credited with gifting the Khuzdul with the arts for which they are well known, such as stonecraft and gemcraft.



Sereniel's sphere is the "roots of the worlds". It is he who molds the inner tracts, twisting the rock of mountains and carving the caverns of the underworld. His refuges are beneath the world; this is where he goes to weep for the sorrow of the Khuzdul, for the evil in the world. His tears are of silver and gold. The dwarves call precious metals that they mine the "tears of Sereniel".

Sereniel (The Judge of Stones)

Also known as "The Twilight Scribe", Sweldre intercedes with his master on behalf of the Sindarin. The demigod is credited with the creation of Selenien, the aesthetic, cursive script used by the Sindarin, as well as with the teaching the Sindarin the arts of music and poetry.



The elves are careful not to abuse their special relationship with Sweldre. More often than not, he is called upon for his wise advice rather than physical intervention. Sweldre's realm is the stars and Yael, the moon. Some believe that Sweldre lights the stars each night, and bears oracular dreams.

THE ILSIRI

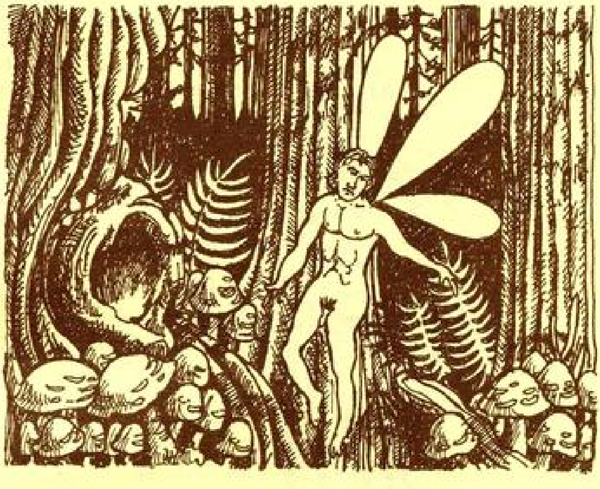
It is said that once, before the other gods took note of the mortal planes, Siem would walk the world speaking in his solitude to the plants, animals and earth. In all things, he found life, although in some it was buried more deeply than others. The god touched those to whom he spoke, and gave them self-awareness, making their spirits know themselves and able to speak to those who could listen. Hence, a myriad of spirit-creatures became aware, and these are called Ilsiri.

Siem did not bind the Ilsiri to serve him, he only helped them to fulfil themselves. Some were grateful and swore loyalty to the Lord of Dreams, but others were small and mean, corrupted by the shadows of other powers, and angry at their awakening. Some were bound tightly to their physical forms, others were able to roam free.

The Ilsiri are ethereal beings of varying, but usually minor, power. Each rock, plant and animal, everything that lived or once lived has, it is believed, a spirit. Some are powerful; some, such as those of the rocks and earth, are slow and dormant, but any may be conjoured forth and spoken with by those who know the keys.

The Free Ilsiri

The free Ilsiri are spirits, once associated with particular objects or creatures, which have since been destroyed. Most Ilsiri perish when their host-object is no more, but some do not; these are the free Ilsiri. The Ilsiri usually possess vaguely humanoid forms of slender proportions, and usually manifest at no more than eight inches in height. They are shy, generally gentle, graceful and translucent, but they can be mischevious, or even dangerous.



The Asiri

The Asiri are ethereal creatures whose elemental base is air. They have the habit of hiding within physical objects with weak or non-existent auras of their own, but they remain free spirits.

The Elmithri

The Elmithri are to water what the Asiri are to air. These are also free spirits, and may be mischevious.

The Aulamithri

These are Asiri and Elmithri, free spirits, who serve Siem by carrying dreams, messages and forgetfulness to the mortal races. Like other Ilsiri, they are noncorporeal, but become visible to mortal eyes under moonlight. Unlike other Ilsiri, the Aulamithri have sworn loyalty to Siem and live to serve him.

THE BLESSED REALM

The King of the Uttermost West resides in the Blessed Realm, a world of "...golden terraces, ruby moons and shrines of ivory...". This is the heaven of the Sindarin, but it is also a place that may be reached before death and returned from. Human adherents believe that this may be their own ultimate destination. Siem sits upon a throne of silver and jade at the top of Mount Sirinar, above a plateau where his court resides, and where he is attended by Sweldre, Sereniel and the lesser lords of dream.

HISTORY OF THE RELIGION

In the conventional sense, there is no church of Siem. Each adherent forges his own personal relationship with the diety, without the necessity of recourse to special holy men. There are no priests among the Sindarin, and no formal institutions of worship.

The worship of Siem was spread to Kethira and Yashain by the Sindarin. It originated on Midgaad. For as long as they have been aware, the Sindarin have honoured Siem, whom they call the "One". Their racial origin is connected with the god; it is he who made them what they have come to be, creatures able to survive the confusion of the aeons before and since the Concordat, able to take joy from the universe as it is, able to survive the presence of more dynamic races such as man. The elves believe that before the intervention of Siem, they were a mean and ugly folk, preoccupied with selfish and worldly matters, ignorant of their own nature and of the beauty that exists in all things. This beauty, or perhaps the ability to perceive it, is often considered to be synonymous with the deity. The is a key element of religious attitudes. Siem is, therefore, synonymous with the salvation of the Sindarin (and the Khuzdul) from the terrors of ignorance. As is attested by an early verse from Midgaad:

> For that which has toppled to fall in dark waters,
> The cry of the evils which savage the land,
> A Father to save all the sons and the daughters,
> Eternity grasped in His bowl by His hand.
>
> Warming the tempest with justice and trusting,
> That darkness retreat from the word that is true.
> Gone are the hate, gone the slaughter and lusting,
> Beyond lies a world of clear rhythm and hue.

This song tells of the revelation of Siem, his attempt to secure the elves against the evils arising about them, and hints at his attempt to lead the Sindarin to the Blessed Realm. Not all of them followed. Some were lost along the way, choosing to fight the evil in other worlds rather than flee it.

To the worshipper of Siem, piety is a reverent affinity with the familiar elements of his living reality, rather than an alliance with the particular entity, Siem. Siemism is a matter of the heart and soul first, of doctrine second, or not at all. In this sense, there are no pure worshippers of Siem, only those who worship the beauty with which he is inexorably associated. It is said that an elf has affinity with his deity from birth; his long life is spent understanding this relationship, finding his place in the workings of Kelestia. It is the ability of the adherent to find joy, and be equally content in all circumstances, that is his strength. This is clearly a matter of self-appraisal and adjustment, not one of intellectual manipulation, a state of grace that can be achieved by anyone, although by some more easily than others. With such a personal view of religion, each act becomes an act of worship or blasphemy, and it is no wonder that there is no priesthood among the elves or dwarves.

The elves, in particular, have a special affinity with Siem and what he represents. Most follow him from birth, but there have been aberrations, tragic creatures who have lost the path. Such figures tend to spend the rest of their (often shortened) lives trying to find their way back to grace.

Holy Men And Acts

If life is its own purpose, celebration is the supreme act of worship. Those who celebrate best are revered. These may be considered special, holy beings, better able to perceive the nature of the god from the perspective of their higher state of grace.

Grace admits of degrees. Those who achieve the greatest affinity are called enlightened. Their works have a special quality of wisdom, they are honoured by their fellow worshippers. Nevertheless, their path to grace is a personal experience, hard to communicate. Others may, however, benefit from stories of the enlightened, even if their paths are unique. Holiness is a quality possessed, in varying degree, by all works of art, rather than a purpose for attempting art. Followers of Siem do not as much sing the praises of creation, their poetry and song are themselves manifestations of beauty, things worthy of admiration in their own right.

Those who attain enlightenment may take any of several courses. Some become lone wanderers. They take to the wilderness that they may better commune with the world, and achieve even higher states. Others make "teaching works", poems, songs, sculptures, etc. to try and foster the same state in others. Eventually, those who find grace, depart for the Blessed Realm which may be reached either by death, or by sailing to the "Uttermost West". There are periodic voyages from the elven kingdoms. Whether such expeditions actually reach the kingdom of Siem, through his divine intervention, or whether this is a way to reach the Blessed Realm by a poetic form of suicide, is usually considered irrelevant. It might be noted that enlightenment is not necessary to reach the Blessed Realm. The Sindarin also depart the mortal planes when they are weary of them, but most try to make themselves worthy before they enter.

The Human Experience

Humans began worshipping Siem c.1300 BT, the time of the Jarin arrival in the Sindarin realm of Harn. A group of Jarin scholars, intrigued and awed by their benefactors, journeyed to King Daelda, and sought permission to study the arts of his people.

Siem was interwoven with the elven arts. Sindarin religion was hard to separate from the elves' way of life. Over the years, the scholars gained a new perspective and began to worship Siem. To humanity, the elves are often perceived as demigods, and this clearly motivated imitation by some humans.

Few humans worship Siem. They are generally confined to the Jarin of northern Harn, the wilderness, or the settlements of the elder peoples. There are also a few pilots, seamen, astrologers and scholars who follow the Lord of the Azure Bowl. Humans have added an extremely loose organizational structure to the church of Siem, somewhat to the amused tolerence of the Sindarin and Khuzdul. Human "priests" are called Inthiar. These are enlightened holy men, many of whom dwell in the wilderness to reach a deeper understanding of Siem. While there are sometimes deemed to be ranks of Inthiar, this is a reflection of the "state of grace" achieved, than administrative rank.

DOCTRINE

Even though there is no true church, there is a body of beliefs common to worshippers of Siem, acts which are considered reverent, actions which are abhorrent. Most worshippers of Siem delve into Natural Mysteries, ancient secrets that extend back to the time Siem resided on Kethira and have to do with the ordering of life. Once these mysteries are mastered, the adherent may act to protect the natural order from that which would destroy it. Often, human civilization is considered a nemesis, for with human expansion comes destruction. It is considered improper to act in ignorance. Because nature, and the elves, are patient, many never act alone.

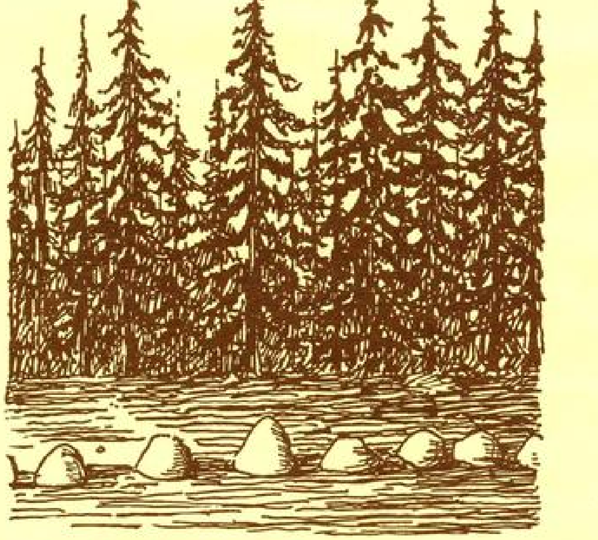
Another cause of inaction is the general belief that Kethira is, primarily, for mankind. While the followers of Siem may preserve parts of it for a short time (in Sindarin terms) the victory of man over nature is inevitable; lasting victory is possible only in the Blessed Realm. Elsewhere the elves are in the twilight of their days.

The sincere adherent is, almost by definition, a moral entity, compassionate, honest and trustworthy, and one who is always striving towards greater wisdom and patience. It goes without saying that he also exhibits a love of nature and the wild things. Those who fail are not condemned by their fellows, only those who do not try.

THE HOLY GROVES

The adherents of Siem do not maintain permanent temples, although there are a small number of informal hostels here and there.

One of the Natural Mysteries is the Holy Grove, sometimes called a "faerie circle" by humans, and the Taur-im-Aina by Sindarin. These are forest glades, that can be found scattered across the worlds. The Holy Groves are, in some esoteric way, linked with other worlds, with the diety, and with nature in general. The mechanistically inclined call them correspondence points, since from such places it is relatively easy to step between worlds. These are used, not only as a means of travel by those who know the ways, but also as places of worship and meditation. It is no coincidence that the Holy Groves tend to be clustered in the lands now occupied by the Sindarin.



RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

There is only one ritual common to worshippers of Siem; it is called communion. It occurs, preferably at a Holy Grove where a simple cairn may be constructed and covered with a soft cloth; a pair of candles may be placed upon it, if they are available, and a bowl (preferably blue) filled with water may be placed between the candles. Prayer and meditation is silent; the worshipper usually gazes within the waters of his bowl and may have visions with which to expand his visualization of the All. Such activities most often take place during the twilight hours between sunset and darkness. Families and close friends may worship together. Such communities generally augment their devotions with songs and poetry, but the essence of worship is inner silence.

SYMBOLS AND REGALIA

The fact that the "enlightened" have a tendency to dress similarly has given rise to the misapprehension that there is a formalized priesthood. Green and silver are hues seemingly favoured by all adherents, browns and grays, colours that enable their wearer to blend into the forest are also common. It is the colour blue that has special significance. Many adherents don an azure scarf, hood or gown when at meditation. Silver, blue and green jewellry, and wreaths of stars or leaves are also symbols of piety.

UTHRIEM ROLIRI

The Uthriem Roliri is the closest thing to an organized group connected to the church of Siem. They are a secretive brotherhood of human woodsmen intent on protecting the wilderness and the wildlife from those who would seek to defile it. The Uthriem Roliri consider the Sindarin to be semi-divine, and they make considerable efforts to imitate the elves.

The Uthriem Roliri exists only on Harn, and was founded in the second century TR, seemingly as a reaction to the depradations against "fair and noble life" committed by the Gargun. It rarely numbers more than one hundred members, and prefers to remain a small and select group. Recruitment is generally by birth, although it is not unusual for an "outsider" to be admitted to the ranks.

The secretive nature and wilderness skills of the Uthriem Roliri have caused them to become minor folk heroes to the common people, most of whom do not associate them with Siem. They are sometimes spoken of in the same terms as supernatural beings, and are occasionally credited with defending human villages, caring for sick and injured wild animals, and protecting and returning livestock, children and "folk of good heart" lost in the wilds. Considering their small numbers, most such tales can be regarded as entirely fanciful or very confused, and some are obviously adapted from earlier folk tales. One example, the tale of Lylanath, which tells of a band of four who turned a Gargun swarm away from an isolated village at the cost of their own lives, is common throughout Harn, although more than a few variants credit the deed to others, or change the enemy into human tribesmen.

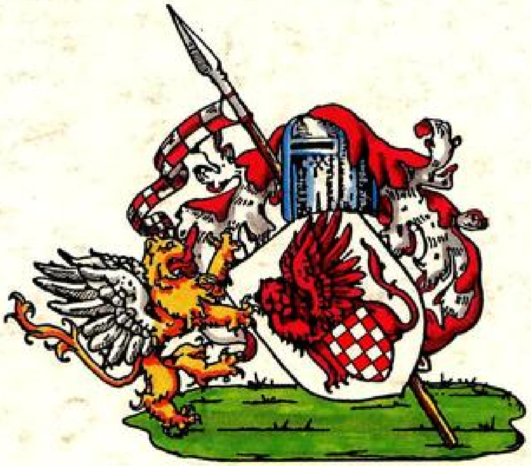
CALENDAR

The adherents of the church consider the 15th of each month, the night of the full moon, as holy days, also known as the Night of High Perspective. The 30th of each month, the night of the new moon, is known as the Night of Silent Renewal. The 15th of Azura is the Night of Golden Twilight, the equivalent of an annual high mass.

GEOGRAPHY

Worship of Siem is primarily concentrated in the elder kingdoms of Evael and Azadmere on Harn. Similarly, there are numerous adherants in the Khuzdul realm of Kuzjera in Ivinia. Human worshippers are fewer and more widely scattered, although most of adherants of the Lord of the Azure Bowl are on Harn. Those individual humans living elsewhere in western Lythia who worship Siem are extremely rare, although some scholars have drawn parallels with the theologies of some primitive human peoples. Generally, such parallels depend on the crudest and most simplistic similarities.

The Libram of the Pantheon



Gods of Harn, the Libram of the Pantheon, bridges the physical and spiritual world of Harn.

Gods of Harn is part of a series of expansion modules for the fantasy world Kethira. It provides detailed and consistent information about the beliefs, religious rituals and internal organizations of the churches of the ten gods.

Gods of Harn is compatible with any rule system you may now use. It allows you to use religion and worship as integral parts of a realistic fantasy campaign, rather than mere notions of "good or evil".

Gods of Harn is beautifully illustrated and includes color plates of clerical badges, heraldry of the fighting orders, formal clerical robes and a Religious Calendar, showing all the significant religious dates.

Gods of Harn is sure to become the standard by which fantasy religious systems will be judged.

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